



LYCHGATE HALL

M · E · FRANCIS



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LYCHGATE HALL

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

IN A NORTH COUNTRY VILLAGE
THE STORY OF DAN
A DAUGHTER OF THE SOIL
MAIME O' THE CORNER
FRIEZE AND FUSTIAN
AMONG THE UNTRODDEN WAYS
MISS ERIN
THE DUENNA OF A GENIUS
YEOMAN FLEETWOOD
PASTORALS OF DORSET
FIANDER'S WIDOW
NORTH, SOUTH, AND OVER THE SEA
THE MANOR FARM
CHRISTIAN THAL

LYCHGATE HALL

A ROMANCE

BY

M. E. FRANCIS

(MRS. FRANCIS BLUNDELL)

Author of "Fiander's Widow," "Yeoman Fleetwood," "The
Duenna of a Genius," "The Manor Farm"
etc., etc.



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TO
MRS. PITT-RIVERS
I DEDICATE THIS ROMANCE
HOPING IT MAY ADD
YET ANOTHER LINK TO OUR FRIENDSHIP

2129803

PUBLISHERS' NOTE.

THIS story originally appeared in the Weekly Edition of *The Times*, and is now issued in book form by arrangement with the Proprietors of that Journal.

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CHAPTER I.

THE STRANGER.

I THOUGHT my heart would have burst when I first sat me down on the high stool in my Uncle Waring's office ; I felt like a stabled colt, or a caged bird, and at times I even told myself I was like a captured butterfly, pinned fast through its vitals. Had I had my will I would rather have driven my Stepfather's team, or plodded my way through the wholesome brown earth with my hand to the plough ; but he would not agree.

"Nay, lad," said he, when I besought him not to make a lawyer of me but to let me bide on the land, "nay, lad ; God knows thou art as dear to me as a Son of my own—there's times when I welly think thee my own flesh and blood. But when all's said and done thou art no Forshaw, and the place has been in the hands of the Forshaws for more years than thou or I could reckon. The Delf must belong to thy Brother Johnny when I'm gone."

"Then, Sir," said I, "let me serve my Brother Johnny. He shall be gaffer and I will be man, and I'll work for him honest and faithful."

"Tut, nonsense!" cried my Father. "If I know thee Luke, thou art as masterful a lad as is to be found in the whole country. Thou'd never bend that stiff neck of thine to bear thy Brother's yoke. Thou'd think of him but as the little chap thou's carried on thy shoulder and

given many a clout to. Besides, it wouldn't be seemly. Nay, take the good chance that's offered thee ; a stool in thy Uncle Waring's office, and the prospect of being taken into partnership, if thou dost well."

I had, of course, known all along that I was to be a lawyer, having indeed received more schooling than would have fallen to my lot had I been bred a yeoman. I had attended for many years the Merchant Taylors' Grammar School at Great Crosby, where worthy Master Waring, a kinsman of our own, had imparted to me all things necessary for a sound commercial education ; aye, and a smattering of the classics, too, for I was a lad of parts, he was pleased to say, and quick at my books. Nevertheless, for some time after I had ceased to con my tasks my brain had been suffered to lie fallow, and except in helping my Father in his farm work I had run wild enough.

But the day came at last when I was forced to face the inevitable ; and, though I protested as has been seen, I knew that I should have to give way. My Stepfather was not one who would suffer *nay* to his *yea* ; I feared him almost as much as I loved him—and that is saying much ; a more kindly, upright, tender-hearted man than Farmer Forshaw was not to be found, I believe, in the length and breadth of England. Except in this matter of my calling he never made me feel that I was not, in truth, his own Son ; and I respected him the more for speaking out his mind so clear and straight on that point. We North-countrymen are used to each other's plain ways and rough speech ; we love each other all the more for them. 'Tis but honest, I have always thought, to tell a man your true mind whether it be pleasant to him or no ; at least he can never cast up at you for having deceived him.

Well, as I say, I was sore grieved at having to exchange my free happy life in the woods and fields for my Uncle's close, gloomy office; had it not been for my daily seven-mile ride to and from his place of business at Upton, the market town, and for getting up early in the morning to ramble about the place, and for working a bit, before supper, in my Mother's garden, I truly think that, sturdy lad though I was, I should have pined and sickened.

One other source of interest and amusement served to enliven the dreary hours of my day: the arrival and departure of the travellers who baited at The Crown Inn just opposite my Uncle's windows.

Sometimes very fine gentlemen alighted from horseback, and I used to watch the reeking nags led away and the folks go swaggering into the house, calling for the Landlord or the Drawer. I used to stare at 'em through the dusty wire blind—there was a convenient slit in it just opposite my desk—while my Uncle, worthy man, scratched away at his parchments, or added up, half-aloud, as was his irritating custom, interminable rows of figures.

And sometimes ladies of quality came in their great travelling coaches—such a parcel of them clambering out one after the other—Madam and Miss, in their hoods and hoop-petticoats, and little Master, with his fine laced coat, and his miniature sword, and his tiny hat with the Ramillies cock in imitation of his honourable Papa's—and the lady companion, and Mrs. Abigail, and the little black page who stood upon the step. And sometimes a lap-dog, and a parrot-cage, and a monkey, and the Lord knows how much more trumpery. And what with the ostlers running to and fro, and the fine folk grumbling, and their servants bawling, and the unharnessing of the

sleek Flemish horses, there was such a stir and bustle in the place as threatened to bring the tiles about our ears.

But on other days only very modest travellers baited at the Crown ; itinerant merchants on their pacing nags, men of business proceeding to Liverpool, honest citizens journeying post with their families in a ramshackle hired coach ; sometimes strings of pack-horses halted there for a feed and a few hours' rest, while those in charge of them drank and gossiped at the bar.

At half-past twelve we broke off work for an hour. My Uncle went to his parlour for dinner ; he would have had me join him, but I invariably declined his hospitality and darted out into the air, there to dispose of the store of food with which my Mother had provided me ; and sometimes I would go into the Crown for a glass of beer, that I might gaze my fill at the travelling folk, and hear the latest news from town.

Those were stirring times. My childhood was passed in the midst of wars and the rumours of wars. There was scarce a town or village in all England which had not sent forth some of its sons to fight under my Lords Marlborough or Peterborough ; but it was wonderful how little people in our quiet neighbourhood troubled themselves about the great events of the outside world. Now and then, indeed, we heard of a great victory, and we huzza'd and lit bonfires ; and we felt, as became loyal Britons, a very righteous hatred and contempt for the French King and all his army, and we thought there was no such soldier in all the world as my Lord Marlborough.

But we knew better than to give way to great anxiety as to the issue, or to suffer the tenor of our lives to be disturbed by undue depression or elation ; our own common sense told us that one Englishman was as good as ten trumpery Frenchmen ; and meanwhile the

ordinary happenings of every day held more place in our thoughts.

I mind when my Father came back from Liverpool market with news of the Battle of Blenheim, he told us first of how the prices went, and next how Widow Tyrer had broke her leg. At last—

“Oh, yes,” says he, “my Lord Marlborough has won a victory, and he hath killed twenty thousand men, and taken the French King prisoner”.

The information was, of course, not altogether accurate, but thus are tales noised about the country.

“And will they cut off his head?” cries little Patty, who had heard, to be sure, of the execution of King Charles, and who thought belike that such was the common fate of kings who were made prisoners.

But my Mother clacked her tongue compassionately :—

“Eh, to think o’ Martha Tyrer breaking her leg!” says she.

One March day, when the thaw had come after untimely snow and frost, and the roads were scarce passable for slush and water, though the weather was so mild that the birds were singing and the very air seemed to smell of growing things, a hired coach drew up in the inn yard, the horses mud up to their middles, and the vehicle itself so much splashed that you could scarce have set your finger on a clean spot.

I was standing at the inn door, munching my bread and meat, when the travellers descended. First a little old chap clambered down from the rumble; very bent he was, but active, seemingly, and I noticed that, though the weather was warm, his collar was turned up so high, and his hat pulled down so low, I could scarce see his face. He nipped down and came trotting round to the coach door, elbowing the “Drawer” on one side, and

cocking up his lean arm. A very slender white hand was laid upon it, and from the inside of the coach there stepped out—a vision !

Though my blood has grown sober enough since then, and my eyes have been gladdened by many bonny sights, I can even now recall something of the wonder and delight with which I gazed upon it.

'Twas a woman of course—a girl, I should say, for the lovely face on which my eyes were fixed was as young and soft as our Patty's at home, and then she had a bloom such as our Patty never had. It was a face at once dark and bright, with a warm, rich colour in cheeks and lips, with brown eyes flashing under black brows, and hair black as night. And then, what a shapely lass it was, and how tall ! And when she moved I thought she was like some of those goddesses they made us read about at the Grammar School.

I was as honest and hearty and wholesome-minded a lad of my years, I daresay, as any in those days, not given to fancies or philanderings, never reading a line of poetry if I could help it, and with a heart beating as regularly as the pendulum of the eight-day clock in the best parlour ; yet I give you my word, when the black-eyed wench walked past me with her stately gait and her scornful air, I felt a pang go through this same heart as sharp as if a knife had been driven into it, and the sweat broke out on my brow.

Like the young fool that I was, though I knew that the coach was ordered to start again in an hour, and though I would fain have feasted my eyes for every second of that time upon her lovely face, I durst not make up my mind to follow her, but remained hanging about the yard, gaping in at the doorway and asking an occasional question of the ostlers and stableboys. From these I learned

that the lady had posted from Liverpool, having arrived by ferry on the previous night. From some words which her serving-man had let fall in the hearing of the postboy, it would appear that they had journeyed as far as Chester in the common stage. I was surprised at this information, for the lady seemed to me of higher quality than those who made use of such a mode of travelling; but while I was cogitating over it, Mr. Billington, the Landlord of the Crown, came hurrying out, and, catching sight of me, beckoned.

"Can you step here a minute, Luke?" cried he. "There's a lady yon as wants particulars about Lychgate Hall. I were goin' to fetch your Uncle, but I doubt you'll do as well."

"Ah, that I will," cried I, growing crimson to my hatbrim, and feeling myself to be all at once a great common gawky, shambling lout; though if I am to believe my Mother and Patty I was nothing of the kind, but as well-favoured and gallant a lad as any in the place.

In a private room off the bar the damsel was standing—my damsel as I guessed it would be—and just behind her the little crooked old man.

"I saw a notice in a News paper," said she, "of a farm to let here. Every advantage offered to a desirable tenant, it says. Can you tell me anything about it?"

"Why, yes, indeed, Madam," I cried eagerly. "Lychgate Hall—'twas at one time a gentleman's house and not a farm at all. 'Tis a fine old house—as much of it as is standing at least—and the land is good land, but we can't let it. It has been on our hands for years. The country folks tell some silly old tale about it as drives every one away."

"Ho, ho!" laughed the Landlord at my elbow. "You're a clever fellow, Luke. Ye'll make a gradely lawyer! I

reckon if your Uncle was to hear ye he'd tell ye summat. Why you'll be frightening the lady off looking at the place."

"No," said she, "I'm not easily scared. I daresay it might suit me very well. I don't mind idle tales. Pray what rent are you asking, Sir?"

"Faith," says I, "anything we can get."

But here the Landlord nudged me in the ribs.

"Hold hard—hold hard, lad!" he cried. "Ye'll never hear the last o' this job if ye don't manage it a bit better. Ye'd best step across and ask your Uncle to come over hissel'—This 'ere young gentleman is new to business, Ma'am," says he to my dark beauty; "he'll be gettin' into trouble if he tries to play the gaffer. He knows naught about the ins and outs o' things," said old Billington, winking and chuckling; "best call in them as does."

I could have shaken him for making so little of me to the lovely girl; treating me as if I were a child instead of a man, full twenty years of age. I thrust on my hat and glowered at him as I passed, and marched out of the inn and across the road with as proud an air as if I had been Sir Jocelyn himself. I found my Uncle nodding in the parlour over a week-old copy of the News paper, which had first been to the Hall and then to the Parsonage, and of which my Uncle himself, good man, had already conned every line.

"A tenant for Lychgate Hall, did you say?" he cried, starting up. "Quick, lad, reach me down my beaver! Get me my stick—where the deuce are my spectacles? Now, Luke, nip into the office and fetch me that roll of parchment in the ninth pigeon-hole on the left-hand side of my desk. Dust it carefully and bring it over to the Crown. I'll step on first."

By the time I had found the pigeon-hole and dusted

the documents my Uncle had entered into parley with the newcomer ; and when I arrived on the scene he was expatiating on the many advantages possessed by what he was pleased to term that very desirable residence Lychgate Hall.

"It was at one time the Dower House of the Gillibrand family," he explained. "The property belongs, as you have doubtless noticed in the advertisement, to Sir Jocelyn Gillibrand. The late Baronet's Grandmother lived in it for many a year ; but the next Lady Gillibrand preferred to live on the Yorkshire estate during her widowhood."

"It is not at all out of repair, I presume ?" queried the lady, with rather a wicked sidelong glance in my direction.

"Out of repair, Madam ?" said my Uncle, adjusting his spectacles, and looking very business-like. "There may be a few trifling dilapidations, such as are to be expected in an antique mansion ; but they can easily be set to rights, easily indeed."

"Has it been long uninhabited ?" was her next question.

I shook in my shoes, for it seemed to me my Uncle looked at me sharply over his glasses.

"Well," said he, "h'm ! h'm !—What a draught comes in at that door, Nephew Luke ! Why don't ye shut it, lad ? Lychgate Hall, Madam, is a very desirable residence—perhaps a trifle large for ordinary folk. For the commonalty, Madam, a mansion of the kind is perhaps—h'm—a trifle too spacious——"

"Then, possibly—" began she ; but extending a bony hand to ensure silence, Lawyer Waring completed his sentence.

"For the commonalty, I say, Madam. To a lady like yourself the mansion would appear eminently suitable. And imposing though it is," he hastened to add, seeing

her again look dubious, "you can, if I may say so, adapt its size to your requirements. You may if you choose, for instance, reside in but a single wing, shutting up the rest of the house." (My Uncle knew well that only one wing was at all habitable; nevertheless he spoke as though the dwelling in it would be a matter of choice and not necessity.) "'Twould suit you, Madam, I protest, most admirably. Being a retired spot it is eminently adapted to mourning; I grieve to note, my dear young lady, those sable habiliments."

Here my Uncle bowed after a fashion equally discreet and sympathetic, and waved his hand towards the damsel's black garments; she received this attention with a glance that was at once haughty and impatient.

"Before coming to any decision," she said, "I must, of course, inspect both house and land. How am I to be conveyed to this place? Is it far from here?"

At this point I so far forgot myself as to interrupt her.

"Why, 'tis a good nine mile," I broke out; "two mile the other side of our place. As for riding there in a chaise the roads are fair bogged just now. The wheels would stick fast as soon as it left the turnpike. The lady must go on horseback."

"Pray who asked your advice, Nephew?" returned my Uncle tartly. "Perhaps riding a-horseback would not be agreeable to the lady."

"Nevertheless, if there is no way of getting a chaise along, I must even venture," cried she. "Is there a side-saddle to be had in this place?"

The Landlord was summoned, but was obliged to confess that such a thing was not to be had. A pillion, indeed, he possessed; the females of his acquaintance being accustomed to ride double behind some male relation or servant.

From having been over-timid I had suddenly grown unusually bold, and before other suggestions could be offered by my elders I struck in with a proposal to convey the lady myself.

"My horse is well used to carrying two," I cried, "and I myself to riding with a pillion behind me. Many a time have I brought my Mother to market, and our Patty too—she often rides with me. And I could show the lady all over the house, and point out the gardens, and the boundaries of the fields better than any man, I believe—except yourself, Sir," I added eagerly, turning to my Uncle.

"I think the idea excellent," exclaimed the girl, before he had time to demur. "'Twill save time and trouble if we start at once. While the horse is being got ready I will take a mouthful of food and then we must be off. Malachi," she added, turning to the old man, "you are to dine and to rest here till I return."

"Ye'd best take me wi' you," said Malachi gruffly. He talked in a strange fashion, unlike the speech of our folks, but not like the travellers who came from London either.

"No, no," she returned impatiently, "there is no need for it. Stay quietly here till I come back."

"Go and see to the horse, lad," said my Uncle. "The Lychgate Hall keys are on the peg over pigeon-hole number nine. Take them down and make what haste you can."

I was already half-way down the steps when he hurried after me. "And see, lad—ride warily. The lanes are nigh impassable, though it ill became you to say so. Keep the young woman to the best side of the house if you can, Luke, my boy, and talk of repairs in a general way you know—don't bind us to do too much."

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW TENANT'S REFERENCES.

IN a quarter of an hour I was at the door of the Crown, leading my nag, duly equipped with saddle and pillion. Lawyer Waring was there, waiting by the horseblock, bowing and rubbing his hands.

"I wish I were young enough to take my Nephew's place, Mrs.—? I do not think, Madam, you have yet honoured us by mentioning your name?"

"My name is Ullathorne," she said shortly, "Dorothy Ullathorne."

"Since you are to be travelling companions perhaps you will be good enough to allow me to make my Nephew formally known to you," went on he. "This is Master Luke Wright, Son of my worthy Sister, Mrs. Forshaw, of The Delf, who was born a Waring, Madam. The lad has good North-country blood in his veins on both sides. I'll venture to say that the Warings and the Wrights are among the most respected families in Lancashire. They have been known for generations to be upright, honourable folk."

Now this was an innocent enough speech, one would think, and if my Uncle were a trifle prolix, it surely might have been forgiven to a man of his years; yet for some reason or other it seemed to incense Mrs. Ullathorne, who cut him short with a sharpness which took us by surprise.

"Pray, Sir," quoth she, "do you think I can stand here all day listening to your family history? I care nothing at all about your Nephew's pedigree, and I care very much to reach Lychgate Hall while the daylight lasts."

I had been blushing from boyish awkwardness during the foregoing explanation, but now my cheeks fairly flamed with wrath and confusion. In sullen silence I assisted Mrs. Ullathorne to mount, my Uncle falling back a little, for he too was much offended; then I got into my saddle and we set off, she holding on by my broad leather belt. We proceeded for some little distance without a word, but presently she spoke in a tone that was gentle enough.

"I like your horse; I have seldom seen a handsomer beast."

Now if there is one way of reaching the heart of a lad of my years more direct than another it is surely to praise that most cherished of all his possessions, his own particular horse. I was, indeed, inordinately proud of Chestnut, who was a fine animal, very nearly thoroughbred, full of mettle, yet without an ounce of harm in him; so affectionate, too, and faithful that even as a colt he would cease his wildest career round the field to come at my call.

"Why yes, indeed," I cried, "Chestnut has not his match in the county, I'll dare swear. We bred him ourselves. My Father—that is, my Stepfather, but to me he has ever been as good as my own—he got Chestnut's dam off Sir Jocelyn Gillibrand, and his sire was Red Knight, one of the finest—but I forgot," I cried, breaking off, "you don't care to be troubled with pedigrees."

"I like them well enough when they concern animals," returned she, with such a tone in her voice as was meant, I felt, to set me in my place.

I made no answer, and rode on in renewed dudgeon, till she suddenly remarked with a laugh, which I took to be somewhat malicious, though I could not in decency turn round to glance at her face :—

“Chestnut! Is that what you call him? Truly, Sir, you have very little imagination. As well call a man Longshanks, or a girl Rosy-cheeks or Dimple.”

Now, though as a rule slow with my tongue, I am ready enough to say a sharp thing when I am vexed, so I answered her back, tit for tat, with a promptitude which took myself by surprise.

“Why, I have heard of such things often enough. There’s a man at our place called Stumpy—naught else—by all the folks, though he was christened Thomas; and I reckon Dimple would be a pretty enough name for a bonny lass.” And I thought of our Patty at home, and of all the little dimples that popped out in her face when she had a mind to be saucy.

“Aha!” quoth she, and her laugh had a more kindly sound, “I may venture to guess that you are speaking of some particular bonny lass—some lass in whom perchance you take a special interest.”

“No, Madam, indeed,” I cried hastily. “Patty and I are like Brother and Sister; she is a Daughter my Stepfather had by his first Wife. We have been brought up together. She is well enough to look at, but there is no great liking between us, save for the sake of our Parents. How could a man think of courting a lass that he sees every day of his life?”

“I have known such things,” said Mrs. Ullathorne, and she heaved a great sigh. “Love comes where he will and as he will,” she went on, “and sometimes in a most unlooked-for fashion.”

And thereupon she fell silent.

We had turned off by this time into a grassy track with a hedge on one side and a dyke on the other. Though but a few days before the land had been buried in snow, and though white patches still lingered here and there in shady places, we now found ourselves in mid-spring. The season had been pretty well advanced before the late fall of snow and the long frost which had succeeded it, and everywhere the green was springing up again, unharmed, it would seem, by its imprisonment. All along the thickset hedgerow the leaf-buds were unfolding; the wheat sown in the autumn spread out fair and even like a green carpet; the flags were shooting up in the dyke, and the water trickled through them merrily, swollen by the melted snow. The larks kept rising from the wheat fields, making a brave din over our heads; and in the distance Neighbour Thornton's mill sails swung lazily round. I was ever one to take pleasure in country sights and sounds, but now as Chestnut paced so sedately along, and I felt in every fibre of me the nearness of this lovely Dorothy, and, though she was silent, thought still to hear the tone in which she spoke of the ways of love, it seemed to me as if that spring day we journeyed together through paradise.

All at once she broke silence impatiently.

"Pray, Sir, cannot this famous horse of yours mend his pace a little? I vow we might be going to a funeral."

Now Chestnut could walk as fast as another horse would trot, and this she might have noticed for herself.

"To be sure," said I; "he can go as quick as you like; I feared but to jolt you."

And then I chirruped to Chestnut and touched him lightly with the whip, and we set off at a canter. Mrs. Dorothy sat on her pillion as easily as in an armchair, and so we swung along until at a turn in the lane—the

land lying lower just there—we suddenly found ourselves in a very swamp. Before I had time to check my horse he was plunging in a morass, and had well-nigh thrown Mrs. Ullathorne, who clung to me with a shriek.

“Never did I see such a God-forsaken place!” she ejaculated petulantly, as we proceeded more cautiously. “As for that beast of yours——”

“Madam,” cried I hotly, “the fault lies not with him but with your own impatient temper. I told you plain enough before we started that the roads were in a bad state.”

She made no reply, and presently, ashamed of my outburst, I ventured to screw my head round so as to glance at her. She did not notice me, but sat looking straight before her, and to my alarm and chagrin I saw that her eyes were full of tears and her bosom was heaving; she was biting her red under-lip as though to still its quivering.

“Oh, Madam, forgive me!” I besought, turning right round with an eagerness that had nigh jerked her from her seat. “Confound my unmannerly tongue! I——”

“You!” she interrupted scornfully, “*you!* Think you I would care for anything you could say, poor foolish lad? No, indeed; I have other matters to trouble me.”

She stopped short and let her gloomy eyes wander over the landscape again; I had thought it so fair but a few moments before, yet she shuddered as though in disgust.

“I hate this North-country of yours!” cried she. “’Tis lonely and dreary and detestable, with its flat fields, and its swamps, and its windmills, for all the world like great white ghosts or ogres.”

“Then, Ma’am,” said I, forgetting my recent remorse, and speaking as sharply as herself, “pray why do you come here? Lychgate Hall is lonely enough I promise

you. I vow you may call it dreary and desolate and God-forsaken and every ill name you fancy, and it will deserve them all."

"I am glad it is lonely," said she. "Now pray give your attention to your horse, Sir, or we shall all be landed in the ditch."

I had been sitting in such a twisted attitude upon my saddle that I was quite incapable of guiding Chestnut; but as for landing us in a ditch the good beast would never have done the like. I gave him my full attention now, however, and we soon left the morass behind, and by the time we had skirted Withy Woods the track grew tolerably sound again. We spoke no more until we came to the cross-roads, and there I could not forbear pulling up a moment so that I might point out to her my Father's house standing amid the surrounding trees, the yellow walls and goodly array of cornstacks and hayricks showing clearly through the bare boughs.

"Yon's The Delf," I said; "'tis there that we live."

"A kindly comfortable place," said she; "a happy home, I am sure."

"'Tis that," I returned. "My Mother—nobody could be aught but happy and well-cared for where she's mistress."

After a pause I went on, as we pursued our way again.

"I suppose you'll not be thinking of living all by yourself at Lychgate? Some of your kin will be coming to keep you company."

"I have no kin," she answered very sharply—"no one at all belonging to me. If I like the place I shall want no company but the dumb things I mean to rear, and the folks who will do for me."

"And a Husband some day, no doubt," thought I to myself, but I dared not say so.

At length, and to her evident relief, though I had been well pleased if the way were longer, our journey came to an end. The tumble-down walls of the old Hall stood out against the cypresses and yews which surrounded it ; and we halted at the lychgate, which gave its name to the place. It was said, and I believe truly, that this was a real lychgate, and that many a coffin had rested under it in bygone days. The Hall was supposed to have been at one time a Friary, and though all trace of Church or Chapel had disappeared there certainly was an old graveyard to the right of the house. It was there the yew trees grew and the cypresses ; and the ground was uneven, and there were large flat stones here and there with writing on them, and a great pile of others lying damaged and broken at the further end. It was said that Cromwell had sent his soldiers to pull down the Church and lay waste the cemetery ; and the country folk, moreover, had a tale that it was unlucky to touch, and above all to carry away, any of those loose stones ; that indeed it was worse than useless to endeavour to build with them ; for that the erection, whatsoever it might be, of which they formed a part was sure to fall to pieces.

We were forced to dismount at the lychgate, and I led Chestnut through ; the old wooden barrier which had once been there had fallen to pieces, and any strange beast that chose could easily have found quarters in the deserted park. Sometimes, indeed, this portion of the land was let for grazing, and then the place was made secure by hurdles, but it bore such an ill name that people thought twice about even letting their cattle pasture there. Of late the grass had been cut twice yearly by Sir Jocelyn's orders, and a large field in the rear of the house was laid down in wheat, that being a crop which was then beginning to be much valued.

I conducted Mrs. Ullathorne to the house first, and to my surprise, instead of being taken aback at its ruinous state, she seemed quite content with it. The middle portion was in the worse condition, the windows shattered, the doors tumbling sideways from their rusty hinges ; but the right wing was in tolerable repair, and in the left one was a great room, airy and lightsome, which had probably once been a dining-hall, with a chamber overhead of the same dimensions.

"This will suit me exactly," said Mrs. Ullathorne ; "I shall make this large parlour my dairy, and the women whom I shall employ can sleep overhead."

"Madam," said I, "I must tell you the truth, though my Uncle would be vexed if he knew that I did so ; you will get no woman from these parts to sleep in this house. The place is said to be haunted, and——"

"Do you think I will be put off by such folly as that ?" cried she. "I will take the place, I say, and if your Northern bumpkins will not work for good wage I will find those who will. As for the women-folk, I presume when they find that the bogeys do me no harm they will consent to risk themselves, at least by daylight. I shall be just as well pleased if they sleep at home. I will turn that upper chamber into the cheese-room then. Yes," she went on, "Malachi and I will live in the right wing ; we shall want but a few rooms—a parlour, a kitchen and a couple of bed-chambers. They can soon be made habitable. I see there is a little furniture."

"Only a few sticks that the last tenant did not think it worth while to remove," I hinted.

"Take me to the orchard," she commanded, without heeding.

Now the orchard was large and well stocked, and her face brightened as she looked about her. The garden,

too, though overrun with weeds had been planted with care ; there were still the remains of many sweet herbs, which had resown themselves each year, and there were rose trees and a lavender hedge, all broken and battered and overgrown, and honeysuckles sprawling over the wall ; nigh to the lavender hedge a number of green spikes were pricking through, and I afterwards identified them as tulips, which, though they make a brave show in the sunshine, are to my thinking gaudy flaunting things. There was also a great patch of sweet violets, budding away as though they had not been so lately embedded in snow. Mrs. Dorothy ran up and down the neglected paths, and peered into an overgrown arbour, crying out joyfully with each fresh discovery, so that I realised, almost for the first time, what a young creature she was in spite of her stately airs.

All at once she opened a rickety door set in the lower wall, and passed through, I following her closely. We found ourselves in the ruined churchyard.

"What is this?" she cried in an altered voice. "A graveyard! Oh, thank Heaven for it! 'Twas Heaven's mercy that brought me to this spot!"

I stared, as well I might ; her face was grave, and her eyes full of tears, yet she wore an expression of deep thankfulness.

"I wouldn't like to live so near a graveyard," said I.

"Mr. Wright," said she, turning with a smile, "I believe you do not wish to have me for a neighbour. Do you know that since we have come here you have done nothing but point out the disadvantages of the place?"

"Nay, Madam," I stammered, "I did but wish to warn you. I—I—indeed I hope you will consent to be our neighbour. It will be my joy to serve you."

I spoke so eagerly that she could not doubt me ; and

now, having finished our survey of the premises, I led out Chestnut from his dilapidated stall, and we rode back to Upton.

If Mrs. Ullathorne had appeared to me somewhat overhasty and unbusiness-like in her eagerness to secure what I could not but think a very unsuitable dwelling-place, she displayed in her subsequent dealings with my Uncle a coolness and a sharpness which took us both by surprise. For not only did she refuse point blank to accept the terms proposed by Mr. Waring, but she proceeded to state her own with great firmness and promptitude.

First of all she volunteered to pay yearly a very much smaller sum than that suggested by my Uncle ; and, moreover, insisted that this should include ownership of the wheat crop already sown ; in the second place she pointed out certain necessary repairs to the house and farm offices which must be undertaken at once. These repairs would not entail any very great expense, and I think my Uncle was rather astonished at the shrewdness which had in so short a time noted the need for them than alarmed at the call on Sir Jocelyn's purse. Finally, she announced her intention of entering into possession immediately.

My Uncle haggled a little over the first two points, but at length gave in ; over the third he looked dubious.

"Immediately, my dear Madam? It will take some little time to make the place habitable."

"The work will get on quicker if I am on the spot," said she. "There are two or three rooms in the right wing which can be made ready in a few hours for my servant and myself. I propose to lie at the inn yonder for the night, but to-morrow morning he and I will remove thither."

"Impossible!" cried my Uncle and I together,

"Madam," continued he, "the place must be reeking damp—'tis—h'm—some little time since anybody dwelt there—and besides—" here he began to rub his hands and to smile ingratiatingly—"we, on our side, have some few requirements. For myself, indeed, your appearance, dear Madam, is a sufficient guarantee; but my employer, Sir Jocelyn Gillibrand—I am, as no doubt you know, acting for Sir Jocelyn Gillibrand—would naturally expect references. Pray, dear Madam, let me know from whom I may obtain references. It is customary when dealing with a stranger——"

At this point he paused, for Mrs. Dorothy had put her hand in her pocket and drawn out a stout leather case from which she produced a roll of bank notes. On the table she now counted out a sufficient number to cover half the sum she proposed to pay annually as rent.

"Those are my references," said she.

My Uncle took them up and examined them one by one; they were good bank notes, unmistakably authentic.

"Well, Madam," said he, with a surprised laugh, "I will not deny that these are very excellent and satisfactory references, but still—it is usual——"

"Take them or leave them, Sir," said she; "no other references will you get from me. As the place bears an ill reputation, and is well-nigh useless to any one at present, and as the sum I offer is more than double that which you will have to expend in the trifling repairs I exact, I should advise you to accept it."

"Why, then," cried he, becoming all at once jocular and hearty, "why then I will—subject to Sir Jocelyn's approval. I will take possession of these notes, Madam, with your permission."

She was restoring the remainder of the notes to her pocket-book when he looked up.

"Madam, if you will excuse me, I think it very unsafe for you to carry so large a sum about with you. Do you not yourself see the advisability of placing it in sure keeping? I should recommend you to bank it as soon as possible, and meanwhile——"

He paused, and she continued, with great simplicity and unusual gentleness:—

"Meanwhile, would you be so good as to take charge of it for me, Sir? I quite realise the danger of carrying it upon me; should I lose this pocket-book I should lose my all."

"Madam," returned the lawyer, much flattered, "I am extremely sensible of the confidence you repose in me, and I assure you it shall not be abused. I have a fireproof safe here, built into the wall, where title-deeds and other valuables belonging to my clients are bestowed in safety. I will give you a receipt for your money and pledge myself to take care of it until such time as you can place it in a bank."

"Nay," she returned, frowning, "I have no wish to place it in a bank, Sir; I shall need to draw out a large portion of this sum to stock my farm, and—and for other purposes. Therefore, it will be a convenience to me if you will consent to keep it for me."

My Uncle agreed in some surprise, and proceeded to take stock of the contents of her pocket-book, which proved to hold notes to the amount of several hundred pounds. She kept back a small sum for her actual needs, and, having duly taken possession of a receipt for the remainder, saluted my Uncle and went away, wearing a very serious face.

CHAPTER III.

THE DELF.

It was dark by the time I reached home, and my family were already seated round the supper-table. My Father looked up from the cold round of beef which he was in the act of carving, with a smile and a nod, and a cheery, "So there thou art, lad! Sit thee down, thou must be welly famished."

"Eh," cried my Mother from her end of the table, "whatever kept thee so long? I was getting afraid summat had come to thee."

"Naught never comes to harm," said Patty, with a mischievous look.

I was just going to sit by her when she said this, but on hearing her I dragged my chair round to the other side of the table, and went back to fetch my knife and fork and trencher.

"Never heed her," cried little Johnny; "Patty, she's been peepin' out o' the window lookin' for thee ever sin' six o'clock, so she needn't pretend——"

"Thou art a silly lad, Johnny," cried she. "I did but look to see what mak' o' night it was. But what kept you so late, Luke? Tell us that."

"It is a long tale," cried I. "I have a bit of news for you all, but I must have a gradely slice of beef first, for, as my Mother says, I'm welly clemmed."

I spoke thus to vex her, and to pay her back for saying

"Naught never comes to harm"; but secretly I was burning to relate the strange happenings of that day; and here my Mother came to my rescue.

"Dear o' me," cried she, "what aggravatin' folk men are for sure! Thou, thyself, Forshaw, 'ull never have a word to throw at a body when thou comes back fro' market; and little Johnny here can scarce tell the names of his schoolmates. An' as for thee, Luke, that rides to town every day an' sees an' hears such a deal——"

"Well, Ma'am," interrupted I, pleased to have an opportunity of delivering myself of my tidings without loss of dignity, "I can't refuse to tell you when you speak so pitiful. You must know then that Lychgate Hall is let."

"Let!" screamed they all, even little Johnny piping out the word with as much astonishment as the rest.

"Let," I repeated triumphantly, "and what's more, let to a lady, and what's more still, to the most beautiful lady I reckon I ever set eyes on; and what's more yet again, she's going to live there all alone by herself except for an old serving-man and such folks as she may hire to do for her!"

Having completed the enumeration of these astounding facts I buried my face in my leathern jack, and after a copious draught fell to upon my supper, answering curtly "yes" and "no" and "I know not" while the women-folk tired themselves out with wonderings and questionings. Never had I felt myself to be of so much importance. My Stepfather, who was slower in speech than the others, and was too much astonished at first to remark upon my announcement, suddenly brought down his fist upon the table.

"Thou'rt dreaming, lad! I canna credit it! The lady has surely not seen the place,"

"Ah, but she has!" cried I. "I took her there myself. I took her there on Chestnut—she rode pillion behind me."

"La!" cried my Mother, "well! And did you say she was young, Luke, and well-favoured?"

"Not much older than Patty, I doubt," said I, "and a thousand times better-looking."

And then I wagged my head at Patty, who tilted her chin in the air, and I thought within myself that I had drawn the long-bow, as the saying goes, and that for all our Patty could not compare herself to Mrs. Dorothy, she was not amiss either. She had a red ribbon at her waist, I remember, that night, and another in her cap; and her brown curls had stolen down as usual beneath the muslin frills, and her eyes were dancing with excitement. I never could tell the colour of Patty's eyes; they had very black lashes, but they themselves were light, and sometimes looked grey, and sometimes blue, and there were times when I told her they were green, but that was when she vexed me. I used to call her Little White-face, too, and make believe I thought her sickly, because I knew that nothing angered her more; but she never ailed anything, and if she had seldom any colour in her cheeks her lips were always red. She was but a little body—I doubt her curly head would scarce reach above fair Dorothy's shoulders, but she had a pretty shape for all that, and many country gallants were already dangling at her apron-strings. She knew well enough—the little hussy—that she was bonny, and my unmannerly speech hurt her not at all; so far from being jealous of the beauty I described she was as anxious as my Mother to hear all about it. But ply me with questions though they might, they could drag no answers out of me on this point; I devoted myself to my plateful of beef less because of my hunger than

from an odd reluctance that I had to speak of what lay so near my heart.

But other things I was willing enough to tell them and by-and-by, pushing away my platter, I gave them full particulars of the arrangement which Mrs. Ullathorne had made with my Uncle, and of her intention to take possession of Lychgate immediately. Then there was an outcry. My Father refused to believe that any woman could be so simple; my Mother, clapping her hands together, declared that she would certainly kill herself, and Patty, turning to her suddenly, besought her to invite the pretty lady to The Delf until her own house should be at least tolerably habitable.

"Why," said my Mother, "if thy Father approves, Patty, I see nothing against it. There is the blue room," she went on meditatively, "always ready, thou knows—the bed well aired and that, and I am sure I should be sorry for our new neighbour to do herself a mischief by lying at that mouldy smelling place for a week to come. Dear heart, to think on't," cried she, her kind face all troubled, "to think of any young woman doing such a thing! What do you say, Forshaw? Shall Patty have her way?"

"Nay, my dear," returned he, "does not our Patty always have her way in this house? She is fair marred. But ask the lady by all means—'tis but neighbourly when all's said and done."

Now I might have thought of this plan myself had not my brain been always somewhat slow, and though the suggestion was Patty's, and I made it a rule to discourage Patty's notions, thus counteracting as far as might be the excessive fondness of my Parents—for I vow my Mother spoiled the wench as much as her Father—my heart leaped up within me at the project. Dorothy Ulla-

thorne actually under our own roof! To see her daily—to converse with her—to do her many slight services it might be—was not this a prospect?

The next day happened to be market day, and my Mother persuaded Mr. Forshaw to let her ride behind him to Upton.

“For,” said she, “I can then speak to Mrs. Ullathorne myself. ’Twill be more seemly, and more hospitable than to send a message through our Luke here; and if she thinks fit to accept our invitation, my dear, then I can ride home with our Luke, and Mrs. Ullathorne can ride back with you. Luke can take a spare pillion.”

My Father agreed, and we all set off betimes; my Mother looking very comely in her new cloth hood and her puce silk dress, her kind soft face all lit up with anticipation.

Nothing would serve me but I must accompany her when she waited upon Mrs. Ullathorne—my Father, having business to transact, set her down outside the Crown—’twere best for me, I said, to make them known to each other, or else the lady would not know what to think of so early a visit.

But when we were ushered into the room my heart failed me, for there sat Dorothy by the window with an expression of extraordinary sadness, and the tears standing on her cheeks.

Then what must my Mother do but pull away her arm from mine, and run across the room to the pretty desolate young creature, and forthwith embrace her.

“Forgive me, my dear,” said she. “I cannot bear to see you in such grief; and though we are at present strangers, I hope we may shortly become dear friends. For you are to be our neighbour, I hear, and the distance between the two houses is very short, and they say you

have no Mother, my love," she went on, all in the same breath ; " I'm sure I feel with all my heart for any one in such a plight, and I hope when you come to know me better you may turn to me sometimes when your heart is heavy, for, indeed, I am sure I shall love you very much."

Now, while my Mother was speaking, she was fondling Mrs. Dorothy's hands and kissing her cheek ; and she had drawn her clean white handkerchief from her pocket and had gently wiped away the girl's tears ; and all the time her face wore what I needs must call the Mother-look, for want of a better term. We have all seen such a look in the eyes of a good woman—aye, many a time have I seen it even in the eyes of a poor beast when its little ones nestle by its side ; 'tis of all things in Nature, I think, the most tender and the most beautiful. Mrs. Ullathorne could not hold out against it ; her pride and reserve melted away, and she threw her arms about my Mother's neck and sobbed on her gentle bosom.

Then seeing that I had nothing to do in that place I stole away, leaving them to each other ; but all that morning I was sore impatient for the moment when I might question my Mother as to what subsequently passed between them. Yet, when she was at length seated behind me on her pillion—Mrs. Ullathorne having gone on before us with my Father—she had not much information to give me ; the lass wept for a long time, she said, and kissed her back when she embraced her, but she had not spoken much.

"And yet I am sure she is good," broke out my Mother, after a pause, during which I had been cogitating over the mystery that seemed to envelop the new-comer.

"Good !" cried I with a start. "Of course she is good. What else should she be?"

"I am only thinking," pursued my Mother, half-shame-facedly, "of a strange thing she said to me. I was making excuses, you must know, for our plain way of living at The Delf, and hoping it would not be displeasing to her, who must be so unaccustomed to the like. 'For,' said I, 'tis easy seen that you are a gentlewoman, whereas we are but honest yeomanfolk.' And then, my dear, she flung her arms about me again and hid her face in my bosom, and cried that if I did but know who she was and what she was I would see that the condescension was on my side, and that I would perhaps have naught to say to her."

"Why, what folly!" I interrupted quickly.

"The very thing I said, my dear! Said I, 'One has but to look in your face to see your character'. 'Oh, as for that,' cried she, 'I am not more wicked than my neighbours.' And then she jerked her head off my shoulder, but in a moment laid it down again—'I am not wicked,' says she, 'dear Madam, believe me, I am not wicked'."

"And neither is she!" I exclaimed vehemently.

"No indeed," said my Mother; "but I wonder what she can have meant, lad."

I wondered too, but did not say so, and we rode on almost in silence till we came to our own gate.

My Father had no doubt made great speed, for there stood Mrs. Ullathorne by the horseblock, and little Patty clinging to her as if they were already the best of friends; Patty, as usual, all curls and dimples, and Dorothy with a brighter face than I had ever seen her wear.

"La!" said my Mother, craning upwards to peep over my shoulder, "don't they make a pretty pair? A Rose and a Lily."

My Mother was a bit sentimental, and loved such a comparison.

"A Lily of the Valley then!" said I to humour her. I was never one for making out such conceits, yet when the word escaped me I could not but think it apt. Patty might very well be called a Lily of the Valley; there were the little bells, you know, to signify merriment, and the sharp sweetness, yet for all that never a thorn, whereas Mrs. Dorothy, Queen of Maidens, as the Rose is Queen of Flowers, would wound sorely all who sought to come too nigh.

Meanwhile Chestnut had been pacing soberly across the grass plot and now ranged himself of his own accord to let my Mother dismount, whereat she pulled me by the sleeve.

"Well, Luke, how long art thou going to sit there staring, instead of giving me a hand down?"

I was off my saddle in a trice, and my Mother, after a cautious descent, turned to Mrs. Ullathorne and bade her welcome very prettily. Patty ran to me, as I was leading away Chestnut, to whisper in my ear:—

"Oh, Luke, I love her! I love her! Eh, she is bonny, and kind too. She is fain to be here, she says, and she was well pleased with her chamber, which, indeed, I made as pretty as I could. I found some daffodils nearly out, at the corner of the kitchen wall, and I popped them into hot water and put them in a vase on the table, and they are showing yellow already."

"And I picked some vi'lets," chimed in Johnny, who had overtaken us, "and Sister Patty put them in a cup before her seeming glass. And the lady has seen my pigeons, Luke, and says they are bonny."

All round, indeed, Mrs. Ullathorne had, it appeared, won golden opinions. Even old Stumpy, our stableman, a surly old fellow as a rule, found a word to praise her.

"A bonny lass, Mester Luke!" said he. "As bonny

a lass as ever come into this place. I reckon 'twould be a shame to let her go out again. You'd best see and keep her, Mester Luke."

I carried away my saddle with a red face, and made believe not to hear him.

"'Twould be a gradely match," went on Stumpy, "ah, sure it would! A gradely match and a bonny bride!"

And then I bade him sharply hold his tongue and rub down Chestnut well, though I generally performed that office myself; but these words of his had set my head awirl, and I went swaggering indoors, feeling that I must needs be a great man since Stumpy thought me fit to be Mrs. Ullathorne's bridegroom.

Nothing of any moment happened during the next few days. Dorothy seemed at ease in our midst, and was very gentle and gracious to us all; she made little ado about our homely manner of living, and for a time showed no trace of the haughtiness which I had thought to detect in her.

But one day she suddenly flashed out in a way that took us all by surprise.

She had behaved very prettily towards my Father from the first, treating him, indeed, with a kind of affectionate respect which called forth our admiration; she asked his advice on many points connected with the management of her new property, and though she herself displayed a wisdom and knowledge which astonished him, she was most ready to listen to his counsels.

Well, it chanced that she informed my Father on this particular day that she wished to buy a horse, and having heard that he had several to dispose of, proceeded very civilly to inquire if he would give her leave to select one from his stock.

"With the greatest pleasure," cried he. "I know that

the horse you will buy will have a good home, Mrs. Dorothy, and I love these beasts of mine as if they were children. There is Fleetfoot—own brother to Chestnut, Luke's horse that ye rid once, I believe—I reckon he'd suit you well enough if you gave him plenty of work—otherwise he might be a bit too mettlesome for ye."

"I don't mind how mettlesome he is," returned she eagerly, "so that he go fast enough to please me; and I fancy he will since you call him Fleetfoot. I must have a swift horse."

"Why," exclaimed my Father with a laugh, "are ye going to take to the road, Madam; d'ye want to be a female highwayman? I have heard of such things," he went on, in high glee at his own jest. "Why there was one of 'em hanged not so many year ago."

'Twas but a clumsy joke, and the good man meant no harm, but Mrs. Dorothy wheeled round upon him with her eyes blazing in her head.

"Do you mean to insult me, Sir?" cried she, stammering and choking over the words so that they were scarcely intelligible. "Have you the grossness to speak thus to me under your own roof?"

My Father fairly gaped, so much taken aback was he; my Mother fell back in her chair dumbfounded; I felt my cheeks flame, but durst not offer a word. But before we could have done more than gasp once or twice our little Patty must needs pop out of her chair, and stamp on the floor, and fall into as pretty a fury as Mrs. Ullathorne herself.

"And how dare you, Madam," cried she, with her eyes sparkling as bright as Mrs. Ullathorne's own, and her little fist clenched, "how dare you speak thus to my kind good Father, who could not say an ill word a-purpose if 'twas to save his life? He meant but to jest, and

you know it well ; and I am sure, Madam, you have had nothing but kindness under this roof, and we all loved you, and—and——”

Here Patty's eloquence was suddenly cut short by an indignant sob.

“Hold your tongue, Patty,” said I angrily, and—“Oh fie, child,” faltered my Mother ; but Mrs. Ullathorne ran across the room and took her in her arms.

“She is right ! She is quite right !” she cried. “Oh, Patty, I love you for taking your Father's part ! I love you a thousand times better than I did before. It is I who am wicked and unmannerly—and, I beg your pardon, Sir,” she added, turning to my Father with so sweet a penitence that he would have been hard indeed not to have forgiven her on the spot. As it was, being the kindest man in the world, he desired her heartily to think no more of the matter, and even made bold to kiss her cheek in token of goodwill.

And so the storm blew over, and he and she were better friends than before, but I for my part felt less at ease in her society, and could not conquer a certain anxiety lest, all unconsciously, our rough ways might give her offence.

CHAPTER IV.

SIR JOCELYN GILLIBRAND.

MRS. ULLATHORNE was forced to stay over Sunday with us, for though armies of stout lasses were employed in scrubbing and cleaning the Hall, it was as yet so far from habitable that my Mother would not hear of our guest removing thither. Moreover, Malachi had been despatched to Liverpool to purchase bedding, cooking utensils and other indispensable household goods, and it would have been impossible for her to take possession of her new premises until his return.

Well do I remember that Sunday morning. We walked, as usual, across the fields to Church ; my Father and Mother leading the way as was their wont, each holding a hand of little Johnny, who was very proud of being permitted to discard his frock and to appear in his little coat and breeches, with white stockings and buckle shoes complete. I followed next, arrayed in my best suit, and reverently carrying not only my own books but those of Mrs. Dorothy. She was habited in black, with a soft lawn kerchief at her neck, and a very elegant hood. I mind her dress well because of Lady Gillibrand's strictures on it.

The first bell was still ringing as we filed through the Church door, which was as it should be, for Lady Gillibrand was mighty particular in this respect ; it was her custom to seat herself in the family pew at the first stroke

of this bell, and woe betide any of the congregation who arrived after it had ceased ringing. From behind the red baize curtain her Ladyship kept watch, and all hapless stragglers were severely reprimanded.

Nevertheless her Son, Sir Jocelyn, not infrequently put in a tardy appearance, for as often as not, instead of taking his place by his Mother's side in the coach, he walked across the fields with his dog at his heels, and switching with his cane at the wayside grasses as though it had been a week-day; there were even folks who averred that in fine weather he sometimes whistled as he went. None of the congregation would have dreamt of imitating such conduct, and many of the elders were grieved for her Ladyship, knowing well what a sore trial it must be to one of her high principles that her own Son, and the Lord of the Manor to boot, should permit himself these indulgences. And when, on quitting the Church, we saw the dog which had been tethered by the gate leap up with unseemly barking and fawn upon his master, those possessed of right feeling amongst us turned our heads away.

My Lady Gillibrand always drove to Church and back in a coach-and-four, and preceded by an outrider. Ferneby Hall lay but a mile away, 'twas true, and her Ladyship was a stout walker; but as she frequently said she would have deemed it a want of respect to visit the House of God in less state than she would have used in calling upon a neighbour; therefore, rain or fine, the great coach came lumbering out of the stableyard on Sunday forenoons, and my Lady seated herself therein, and whether Sir Jocelyn rode with her or no Master Robert Bilsborough and Mrs. Penelope Dugden took their places opposite to her. They knew their duty well, poor souls, and never presumed on being relations of the family.

They were kept more or less for charity, as every one knew ; Master Robert, indeed, was called Sir Jocelyn's secretary, but as Sir Jocelyn seldom writ any letters, and was frequently absent from home, Master Robert's duties consisted mainly in small offices undertaken to please her Ladyship. He played at piquet with her of an evening, walked her dog out of a rainy day—though Mrs. Penny washed and combed it—carved the joint at dinner, kept her accounts, paid the wages and occasionally chattered a recreant tenant when she found it inconvenient to do so herself ; but as a rule Lady Gillibrand preferred to deliver her own lectures.

On one occasion I remember he had been told off to superintend the personal chastisement of seven little lads who had been caught red-handed in the big orchard. The whipping was to have been administered in each case by the father of the culprit, and all the youngsters of the village were called out upon the green that the spectacle might strike terror into their hearts. But just as the dread ceremonial was about to commence who should arrive on the scene but Sir Jocelyn himself, who had returned unexpectedly from London. On inquiring into the nature of the offence for which punishment was about to be administered, Sir Jocelyn burst out a-laughing.

"Why," cried he, "not all the floggings in the world would ever cure village lads of stealing apples. 'Tis in their nature, and they will lose the love for it only when each drops his sweet tooth. Hold your hands, good folks. And you, Cousin Robert," he added, turning to Master Bilsborough, "do me the favour to bring me a basket of apples from the granary."

Master Robert departed with a sour face—there were folks there who said he had liefer seen the children suffer ; but he was bound to do his Cousin's bidding, and pre-

sently the little urchins, who had but a few moments before looked so pale and woeful, were gleefully leaping to catch the rosy pippins which Sir Jocelyn tossed among them.

He was good-natured enough, this fine dashing gentleman, Sir Jocelyn, yet of fitful mood as might be seen even in such matters as his dealings with the lads, for in the same year he caught an urchin carrying off a tit's nest, and thereupon collaring him, in wrath, caned him with his own hands till he shrieked for mercy ; yet surely if there be no sin in stealing apples there should be less in bird-nesting, which comes just as natural to a lad and after all wrongs nobody.

But I am wandering from my tale of what befell that Sunday morning. After service, though we were at liberty to leave the Church as soon as we pleased, provided we displayed no unseemly haste and took care not to jostle our neighbours or to speak until we had reached a sufficient distance from the door, it was our custom to wait about the churchyard and steps until Lady Gillibrand had taken her departure. I believe her Ladyship considered the spectacle of her stately entry into her coach as edifying and wholesome for us common folk as any part of the Sunday observance ; and, moreover, during her progress to the gate she found time to speak to many of her parishioners. I say *her* parishioners, for in point of fact I believe she thought the care of our souls devolved quite as much upon her as upon good Master Formby, the Rector, who for his part was quite willing to share his responsibilities with her.

Many a kind word did the good old lady say to those in trouble ; and many a sharp lecture did she administer to such as she deemed in need of it. It was now a promise of elderberry wine for Dame Alton's cough ; now a

recipe, hastily given in a lowered voice (not being quite sure whether she did well to speak of such matters on the Sabbath), for John Frith's Thomas's lumbago, and much I pity that good man if his Wife followed her Ladyship's directions, for the mixture of mustard and turpentine was to be applied with no sparing hand ; now a word of sympathy for Molly Dibden, who had had news of her Brother's loss at sea ; now a stern reprimand for Susan Richardson, who had been seen walking with her Wooster after dark.

I was standing near the gate, respectfully waiting like the rest till her Ladyship should pass, when I heard Dorothy's impatient voice in my ear.

"What is the matter? What do we all loitering here?"

"We are waiting," said I, "for Lady Gillibrand to get into her coach. 'Tis the custom."

"Well, I for one will wait no longer," cried Mrs. Dorothy. "She seems to be lecturing half the parish ; and I am sure the wind blows cold enough round this corner to reach one's marrow."

And with that she pressed past me and walked down the steps.

Now I could not in any decency suffer our guest to depart alone, and I therefore followed her, looking sheepish enough, I daresay, and hanging my head, for I knew the neighbours would think such behaviour scandalous. As we reached the bottom of the steps Sir Jocelyn, who was untying his dog, barred our way for a moment.

"May it please you to let us pass, Sir?" asked she, as imperiously as though she was speaking to poor me.

As he glanced up, still half-stooping, their eyes met nearly on a level, and I saw a look of astonishment and admiration leap into Sir Jocelyn's. He straightened himself altogether, doffing his hat quickly, and standing

aside. She dropped him a curtsy and went through the gate, and I followed, uncovering as I stepped past Sir Jocelyn.

"Why, whom have you there, Luke?" inquired he eagerly. "How comes that lady in your company?"

"Sir," answered I, turning hat in hand, "it is Mrs. Dorothy Ullathorne, who has taken Lychgate Hall. She is staying at our place until her own be ready."

"Ha! my new tenant!" cried he. "I had heard of her, but I had no idea she was such a stately piece. I must do myself the honour of waiting upon her."

I scarce tarried to hear the end of the sentence but hastened after Mrs. Dorothy, who had by that time turned the corner of the road. I immediately relieved her of her books, and we walked side by side for some time in silence. Then, for the sake of saying something, I asked her what she thought of Sir Jocelyn Gillibrand.

"Was that the gentleman by the gate?" asked she. "I think he has a very fine dog."

"Is that all?" cried I, disappointed, for though we did not always approve of Sir Jocelyn's doings we loved him and were proud of him.

"I also admired his ruffles mightily," said she.

"And have you no word for the man?" I asked her.

"Oh, the man is well enough in his dark way. I have no great liking for black men," said she.

I was pleased to hear this for my own hair was the colour of the corn, and had not my face been so browned by the sun I should have been ashamed of its womanish pink and white; so it was with great satisfaction that I informed Mistress Dorothy of my pleasure in hearing she preferred light men.

She stared at me for a moment, and then detecting, I suppose, something of a smirk in my face, for I was but

a simple fellow in those days, she began to laugh after a fashion that much offended me.

I was indeed minded to take her to task, but before I could carry out my intention a great clatter behind us made us start, and turning round I saw Lady Gillibrand's outrider galloping towards us, followed by the coach itself. I drew Dorothy on one side, but instead of passing us as I expected the equipage halted when it came up with us. I saw to my surprise that Sir Jocelyn was seated by his Mother, Mrs. Penny being opposite to her alone, from which I concluded that Master Robert had been deputed to walk home with the dog in his Cousin's place. It flashed across me that the Baronet had made this exchange to gratify himself with a further view of his new tenant.

Her Ladyship, leaning out of the window, beckoned me to approach, which I did, hat in hand.

"Pray, Luke Wright," inquired she, "what might be the reason of your undutiful haste in leaving the sacred premises this morning?"

I stammered apologetically that I deemed it but civil to escort Mrs. Ullathorne home, she being our guest.

"And pray why could not she have waited like anybody else?" retorted my Lady sharply; and her hawk's eyes shot fire under their grey brows.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Penelope timidly, "perhaps. Cousin Gillibrand, she did not know the custom."

"Pray, who asked your opinion, Cousin Penny?" snapped her Ladyship. "I am surprised that you should defend a young person who behaves in such a manner, and who is altogether so unmindful of her position. Do you observe, Penny, that she wears a silk gown and a hoop? A modish hood, moreover—surely a plain straw hat," said her Ladyship with emphasis, "had been far

more suitable. Desire the young woman to come to me, if you please, Luke Wright."

Turning hesitatingly away from the fire of one pair of dark eyes I encountered that of another ; Mrs. Dorothy had overheard Lady Gillibrand's speech and was ill pleased at its tone.

"Tell the lady that I am in a hurry, and cannot conceive what she can have to say to me," she responded very audibly.

"Eh! What does she say?" came sharply from the coach window.

"Madam," said I in a low voice to Mrs. Ullathorne, "my Father and Mother have a great respect for Lady Gillibrand, and would, I think, be much grieved were you to offend her."

Thereupon, with an ill grace enough, Mrs. Dorothy drew nigh the coach, holding her head high and curtsying very slightly. Her Ladyship looked her up and down, and Sir Jocelyn, who had been leaning back silently in his corner all this time, now bent forward, removing his hat with a low bow.

"You are Dorothy Ullathorne, I believe," said Lady Gillibrand at last ; "our new tenant at Lychgate?"

Dorothy inclined her head.

"I shall be pleased to make acquaintance with you," went on her Ladyship more affably. "You may come to the Hall to-morrow afternoon between three and four, if you please, to discourse with me, and after our conversation my Cousin, Mrs. Penelope Dugden, can give you a dish of tea in the stillroom."

"I am much obliged, my Lady," returned Dorothy, with just a little lifting of the corner of her lip, "but it is not my purpose either to make visits or to receive any."

"Hoity-toity!" exclaimed Lady Gillibrand, almost too much surprised to be angered. "You must be a very strange young woman."

"It is my intention to remain so, your Ladyship," replied Mrs. Ullathorne.

Thereupon Mrs. Penny, who was but a foolish body, though harmless and good-natured enough, suddenly laughed, and her kinswoman turned upon her as she invariably did on the smallest provocation.

"Now why did you laugh, Cousin Penny? I am much desirous of knowing why you should laugh when there is nothing to laugh at."

"I really don't know, your Ladyship," responded the poor woman, growing suddenly prodigiously grave. "I thought you was going to laugh yourself."

"*Me!*" said her Ladyship sternly.

"Yes, indeed," stammered Mrs. Penny. "I am sure I thought you was going to laugh, Cousin Gillibrand. 'Twas such a droll saying of the young woman's. When you said she must be very strange, that she should return she desired to be so."

"Droll!" cried Lady Gillibrand, "not in the least droll, Cousin Penny. A most unbecoming speech. Truly you grow more weak-minded every day. Another time, if you please, before you imagine that I am going to laugh have the manners and politeness to consider if I am *like* to do so."

I presume Mrs. Penny dutifully promised to bear this admonition in mind, but I did not wait to hear her protestations, for Dorothy had already walked on, and I profited by the fact of her Ladyship's attention being diverted to follow her.

Almost directly after I had overtaken her the coach came swinging past us, her Ladyship not being visible,

but Sir Jocelyn's dark face showing for a moment as he again bent forward.

Lady Gillibrand, however, was not easily baulked, and the following evening, a little before supper-time, she drove to The Delf in her low chaise.

I was planting out some July flower roots in the narrow beds beneath the parlour window; I had recently chosen to be very assiduous in my attention to these borders, the reason being that Dorothy and Patty usually took their sewing at this hour to the window-seat, so as to make the most of the evening light, and that while I worked I could hear their voices, and now and then shout out a word to them through the pane. On this particular evening the casement was open, and, as Lady Gillibrand on entering took a seat near it, I was enabled to catch the greater part of her conversation.

"Beef!" said her Ladyship, "cold beef! Mrs. Forshaw, I am surprised at such extravagance. Why, what a monstrous joint is that, and meat threepence a pound! I wonder you can reconcile it to your conscience."

Lifting my head I could see my Mother's deprecating face as she stood by the table and caught a word or two of her murmured reply; but this was soon cut short by her Ladyship.

"Your menfolk! You pamper your menfolk, my good woman. Meat twice a day is sinful waste for people in your position. A mess of bread and milk for the young folks or good wholesome porridge would be far more suitable; and your Husband could do very well with a fresh egg."

"Or bread and cheese," put in Mrs. Penny humbly.

Lady Gillibrand glared at her for a moment before adopting the suggestion.

"Or bread and cheese, as I was about to say when you

interrupted me, Cousin Penny. *Or* bread and cheese—home-made cheese, of course.”

“Indeed, my Lady,” protested my Mother, for even a worm will turn, “we never have boughten stuff. We make our own cheese as well as our butter and bread; and, of course, there’s our own bacon——”

“Now bacon,” interposed Lady Gillibrand, “a small piece of bacon with greens or dried beans would be very suitable for your midday meal, Dame Forshaw. It would save butcher’s meat, and be quite sufficiently nourishing. Pray adopt this plan, my good woman, and endeavour to reduce your household expenditure.”

But hereupon our Patty, who could never keep that little tongue of hers still for long together, suddenly broke out:—

“I don’t think my Father would agree to that, your Ladyship”.

Lady Gillibrand was turning round to administer a severe reprimand when she suddenly caught sight of Dorothy, who since her entrance had been standing like every one else.

“Oh, the young woman is there, I see,” said her Ladyship. “The object of my visit was mainly to see you, Mrs. Ullathorne. Though I cannot but admire your retiring disposition,” said my Lady sneeringly, “I consider it a duty to make myself acquainted with my Son’s tenants. Pray be seated.”

Dorothy very composedly resumed her place on the deep window-seat.

“You come from——?” pursued Lady Gillibrand. “I don’t think you mentioned your former place of residence.”

“I did not, my Lady,” returned Mrs. Dorothy quietly.

“Pray where have you been living till now?” resumed the questioner.

"In the south of England," replied Dorothy, after a moment's pause.

"'Tis a somewhat vague answer. Can you not name a town—or, at least, the county?"

"I have no doubt I could, your Ladyship," responded the girl.

Here Mrs. Penny, whose pale blue eyes had been growing large with consternation, took upon herself to raise a warning finger, which her kinswoman perceiving, promptly rapped downwards.

"What are you pointing at, Penny? Pray, where did you learn such manners? Even a child would know 'twas uncivil to point. Surely your Father, my Kinsman, must have taught you better.—By the way, Mrs. Ullathorne, I omitted to ask what your Father was?"

Dorothy had till now submitted unwillingly enough to the inquisition, and had responded with a calmness not unmingled with amusement to her Ladyship's various questions, but at this one she suddenly rose to her feet, and I could see that one of her fits of passion was upon her.

"Madam," cried she, "you have no right to question me in this manner, and I will not submit to it. My former place of abode, the position of my Father, my private affairs, in fact, concern no one but myself. I have the honour to wish your Ladyship a good-evening."

And with that she walked out of the room.

Well, my poor Mother, of course, came in for the scolding which should have been Mrs. Ullathorne's if she had had the decency to stay for it; she was warned against admitting persons of doubtful antecedents into her family, who would, of a certainty, deteriorate in consequence; indeed, her Ladyship had already noticed a change for the worse in Patty (now called up to receive the reprimand postponed at sight of the stranger); I myself had also

suffered from the contact, my demeanour yesterday having been the reverse of decorous or respectful. Lady Gillibrand could not but think that even my Mother had been infected by the general taint, since she was quite sure that she had been led into sinful extravagance and display in order to present a notable appearance in the eyes of that very forward and presumptuous young woman, our guest. Having assured my Mother at parting that her imprudent conduct was not only laying up a store of misfortune for herself and her family in this world, but also, in all probability, in the world to come, her Ladyship took her departure, and my Mother proceeded tearfully with her interrupted preparations for supper.

"I am sure," she sighed, "I never knew before there was so much harm in a cold round of beef. Folks as works hard all day wants a bit o' summat as 'ull stick to them. Bacon, now," she proceeded dismally, "bacon is well enough for a snack, but I doubt the gaffer——"

"Mother," I broke out, thrusting in my head at the window, "Mother, give over! You are in the right, and you know it. If I had my way the only notice I'd take of her Ladyship's saucing would be to have two rounds of beef instead of one."

"La! Hark at him!" said my Mother with a shocked laugh. "You oughtn't to say such things, Luke. For shame of ye!"

But Patty reached out her hand and slapped me on the shoulder.

"Well done!" cried she, "I'm o' your way of thinking."

CHAPTER V.

AN OMEN AND THE ENCOUNTER.

WELL do I remember the day on which Dorothy Ullathorne finally took her departure from amongst us. In company with all the females of the household she went over to Lychgate early. I noted that in taking leave of my Father the tears flashed for a moment into her eyes ; she seemed to have an almost filial reverence for him, at which I sometimes marvelled. For he was very simple in his ways, and never set up any affectation of learning or gentility, being content to seem what he was—a plain honest yeoman. I did not bid her farewell, for I was to ride over Fleetfoot—she having purchased him—that evening on my return from the office, and escort our Patty home.

At the appointed hour I duly alighted at the lychgate, and having rubbed down and fed the horse (for though Mrs. Ullathorne had engaged a fairly large staff of labourers, I knew that none of them would be about at this hour), I made my way round to the house. My Mother and her maids had long since departed, but Patty was still busy tying up curtains and hammering in nails. She was mounted on a table in the small dark parlour when I entered, standing a-tiptoe and stretching out her arm in the endeavour to pass some brass rings over a curtain rod. The mistress of the house, whose taller stature would easily have enabled her to achieve

what Patty vainly strove to accomplish, stood by, watching her with apparent apathy.

"So there you are!" cried Patty gleefully. "You come just in time; I want your long arm here."

With that she jumped down from the table, and I, nothing loth, sprang upon it.

"Now we look better," quoth the little lass, as in a trice I descended again, having slipped on the rings and made fast the curtains to them. "When these are drawn of an evening you will feel quite snug."

Dorothy looked round the barely-furnished room, which, if truth be told, presented but a miserable appearance, and suddenly flung her arms above her head.

"Oh!" she cried with a kind of groan, "oh, I am sick at heart!"

The exclamation was evidently wrung from her, and the next moment she appeared ashamed of it.

"Snug, my little Patty?" she said in an altered tone. "Yes, to be sure, I am now snug enough, and I know not how to thank you and your Parents for all your kindness. And you too, Master Luke," she went on, turning to me with unwonted graciousness.

I stammered forth I know not what protestations of my eager desire to serve her at all times, and in whatsoever way she would, and she listened half absently; and then, having been enjoined by my Mother to bring Patty home in time for supper, I despatched her in search of her hat and cloak. Mrs. Dorothy accompanied me to the door while Patty went to tire herself; and as we there stood awaiting her return in silence, there came to us one of those strange experiences which sometimes fall to the lot of man.

I vow as I stood there against the crumbling door-post I had no thought of the many tales connected with

Lychgate ; my whole mind was absorbed by Mrs. Dorothy, and if it struck me that the place looked lonesome and gloomy it was but in connection with her. It seemed to me pitiful that so young and brilliant a creature should be doomed to spend her days in solitude in that desolate spot. Desolate indeed it looked at this hour, the house standing up dark against the dusky sky ; the melancholy trees seeming to press round it threateningly. No living soul in sight—though Malachi was doubtless occupied somewhere in the back premises—not even a dumb thing to bear her company as yet, with the exception of poor Fleetfoot, who could be heard stamping and rattling his rack-chain in the stable. These sounds served but to accentuate the prevailing stillness, as did the occasional croak of a raven, and the sudden screech of an owl.

But all at once another sound broke upon our ears, a low heavy rumbling of wheels, as of a coach advancing at a foot's pace ; and then the tradition attached to Lychgate flashed across my mind. I looked hastily at Mrs. Dorothy, who had turned her head in the direction whence came the sound.

"Who can be abroad so late ?" asked she. "I thought this an unfrequented road. What should a waggon do journeying along it at this hour ?"

"It is no waggon !" said I ; my lips were parched and I felt a creeping sensation of the flesh. Thought I to myself, If yonder travellers halt by the old cross I shall know that the tale is true.

The sound drew nearer ; in the intense stillness we could distinguish, besides the rumbling of wheels, the slow tread, not only of horses' hoofs, but of men's feet, pacing in unison.

"What is it ?" cried Dorothy, and I saw in her face a reflection of the terror in my own.

Suddenly the noise ceased ; I could have sworn the unseen cavalcade had reached the old Cross at which in former days each funeral train used to halt on its way to the churchyard. I smothered the exclamation which rose to my lips, but Patty, rushing downstairs and seizing my arm, was not so cautious.

"Oh, Luke!" she cried, "Luke, didst hear it? It is the Ghost Coach—the Funeral Coach. The folks were quite right, thou sees. It will be coming on here in a minute. Oh! Oh! I shall die of fear."

My own teeth were chattering in my head. I vow I had sooner faced an army of cut-throats—live ruffians of flesh and blood—than that invisible train ; but I rallied my composure as best I could and steadied Patty on her feet, and told her she need have no fear, for spirits could not harm honest folk.

Mrs. Dorothy did not scream, but when the awful progress was resumed, and the very air seemed full of the rolling of wheels, and the heavy tramping of feet, she caught my hand, feeling, I presume, the need of human touch and sympathy ; and in the midst of my terror I was conscious of a thrill of rapture though her hand was cold as ice.

I do not pretend to explain how or why such visitations are permitted ; it would seem impossible, on the face of it, that there should be such a thing as the ghost of animal or an inanimate object, yet no doubt the sounds which fell upon our ears were such as might have been produced by the slowly approaching wheels of a hearse or the coach-carriage which in those days rich folks sometimes lent to convey bodies of their tenants or neighbours to their long home. I swear that I also heard the ring of the horses' hoofs as the procession drew nearer, the rattling and creaking of steel and leather, and, above all,

the continuous tramp of many feet. Though we strained our eyes towards this unreal procession as it advanced, we could see naught ; and I think the fact increased our terror.

The sounds grew in intensity and distinctness until the ghostly train reached the lychgate, where it appeared to halt, and we heard nothing further.

Silence reigned unbroken until Dorothy, turning to me, whispered quickly, "Are they coming up here?"

"I think not," said I. "I have never heard of them passing the gate. I—I don't think we shall hear anything more now."

As we stood clutching each other's hands, our faces pale and our eyes starting, for I think there is no such desperate fear as that engendered by the proximity of the supernatural, the barn owl, whose strident voice had before grated upon our ears, came lumbering round the house and flew shrieking towards a distant wood. Dorothy withdrew her hand from mine with a sigh of relief ; the advent of the live thing had, as it were, broken the spell.

"Well," said she, "there is some foundation, after all, for the tales which we made so light of. Does this often happen?"

"Not often, I think," I replied, "but then the folks shun the place so, 'tis hard to say."

"After all, a strange noise cannot hurt one," she resumed. "We are none of us the worse for it, you see. Come, Patty, lift up your head. You need not stop your ears any more. There is nothing to be heard."

Patty raised her scared face from my shoulder where it had been burrowing.

"Oh, Dorothy, I like it not," she cried. "I'm frightened to death. An' 'tis so unlucky it should happen the very first night you come here."

"'Tis an omen—is it not?" said Dorothy. "Well, I for my own part never expect good luck—there is no such thing for me, Patty, my dear. If that Ghost Coach coming at this hour portended my speedy death I think I should be glad. But I have no belief in such things—it may have been an echo carried from a distance, or the wind in those dismal trees, for aught we can tell."

But she knew very well that no echo could have been so persistent and so distinct, and as for the wind—not a breath stirred that night.

She put her fingers under Patty's chin so as to tilt up the little white face—whiter than ever to-night, as was to be expected—and kissed it.

"You will be loth to come here again, Patty," said she.

But Patty, though she was still shaking from head to foot, stoutly averred that she would come on the very morrow.

Going home the little wench, clinging to my arm, proposed, to my surprise, that we should keep the strange event of the evening a secret. I agreed willingly enough, and respected her for the resolution; I thought she had been anxious to proclaim it to all comers, and was the more pleased with her discretion.

"I think there is something very strange about everything that concerns Dorothy Ullathorne," said she, "but I love her very much and I pity her too, and I think 'twould be a shame to set folks talking about her."

This speech I commended heartily, and promised for my part to be equally reserved.

Patty and I seemed to be better friends from this out, and though she never gossiped about the newcomer to other folks she confided many tales of her doings to me. It was thus I learned of the encounter between Sir

Jocelyn and Mrs. Ullathorne, which so inauspiciously inaugurated their acquaintance.

Sir Jocelyn and Master Robert had gone a-coursing, and the hare chose to cross over the dyke into Mrs. Ullathorne's land, followed in hot pursuit by a brace of greyhounds and the gentlemen on horseback. Poor puss doubled backwards and forwards through the wheat with the dogs after her, and the Squire and Master Robert galloping here and there, the better to see the sport, their horses' feet trampling the corn and tearing up the earth. Mrs. Ullathorne, looking forth from the window of the new dairy, which was by now almost ready for use, uttered an exclamation of anger and surprise and flew at top-speed towards the horsemen. Patty, popping her head out of the window too, and identifying these, raced in her wake, being anxious to prevent high words.

She arrived too late, however. Sir Jocelyn had already dismounted, and with a smile upon his face was listening to the fiery tirade which Dorothy was in the act of pouring forth. He did not appear at all disconcerted, however, and presently remarked, when she paused for breath:—

“Forgive my interrupting your discourse, Madam, and permit me to remark that there is perhaps nothing so very heinous in my chasing my own hare over my own land”.

“Sir,” retorted she, with ever-growing wrath, “the land is now mine to all intents and purposes, and whatever may be the custom in this matter of the chase during the winter months, I cannot but think that now, when the crop is so far advanced, you have no right to destroy it. Oh, look, look!” she cried, as Master Robert again swept past them amid a shower of earth and blades, “every moment fresh damage is done,”

Sir Jocelyn glanced round at his Cousin and then back again at Mrs. Dorothy.

"Had you but spoke fair," said he, "it would have been my pleasure to remove at once any cause of offence ; but I own I am not now inclined to relinquish my privileges. I will call off my dogs and desire my Kinsman to desist his sport only after you have paid the penalty of your sauciness."

"A penalty!" cried she, and her eyes flashed fire.

"Aye," said he ; "before I leave this place you shall give me a kiss in token of repentance and goodwill."

Now most wenches on the estate would have deemed it an honour to have been saluted by the Lord of the Manor, but if I am to believe Patty, Dorothy Ullathorne, at all times touchy with regard to her personal dignity, was thrown by this request of Sir Jocelyn's into one of her ungovernable fits of rage.

"Thou knows," said Patty, in relating the affair, "how Dorothy's eyes seem to blaze when she is wrathful ; her look to-day fair frightened me. 'Oh ! that I were a man !' cried she. 'In that case, doubtless,' said Sir Jocelyn, 'my life would not be worth a moment's purchase. If a glance could slay I were already dead. But since you are not in a position to frighten me, my fair tenant, come, let us kiss and be friends. I vow I'll not go back on my word.' 'Your word of honour, I suppose,' said she, with that twist of the lip thou knows, Luke. 'I had rather every rood of land were laid waste.'—And with that she turned and walked away. I saw the red rise in his face—if you had heard the scorn with which she flung the word *honour* at him. He looked as if she had struck him."

"Well, and he ought to have been ashamed of himself," cried I. "He should not have vexed her so, and 'twas

ill done of him, though he is the Squire, to destroy the good corn that's worth its weight in gold. What said he then, Patty?"

"He looked after her," answered Patty, "and then muttered half to himself: 'My pretty Madam, I'll bring you to your senses yet. Better folks than you have shown me less scorn.' Then one of the greyhounds killed the hare and Master Bilsborough bringing it to him, Sir Jocelyn bade him ride to the house and present it with his compliments to Mrs. Ullathorne, assuring her that coursed hare was an excellent thing and safe to be tender. 'Call her particular attention to this point, Bob,' said he, 'for the lady, I am certain, appreciates tenderness.'"

"And did she keep the hare?" cried I.

"Not she indeed. She desired Malachi to hand it back to Master Bilsborough, and to bid him inform his Cousin that she had no mind to receive goods wrongfully obtained."

Not long afterwards Mrs. Ullathorne came into yet more violent contact with her Landlord, after a fashion which had serious consequences.

My Uncle Waring having, as has been said, undertaken the safe keeping of the large sum of money of which she was possessed on arriving, she visited him one day for the purpose of withdrawing a certain portion of it, for which, as she stated, she had immediate need, being desirous of purchasing dairy cows and other stock.

"Your serving-man is doubtless attending you," remarked my Uncle as he handed over sundry bank notes to her.

"No," returned she, "I rode in alone; we have no horse that can keep pace with that I bought of Mr. Forshaw, and 'twould weary me to go slow enough to suit the nag

Malachi rides. Besides, I have no need of an escort—what ill hap could befall me—a plain woman going quietly about her business?”

“I doubt it is not safe for you to go all that way along such lonely roads by yourself,” returned he. “With that money about you too, Mrs. Ullathorne, I protest you are worth robbing.”

“Pooh!” cried she, and was turning away when Mr. Waring called out to her that she should at least accept my company. I should leave off work a little earlier in her honour, he said, and as our roads lay together for the most part she need have no scruple in availing herself of my protection.

I was already half-way to the door ere he had concluded his speech, and she turned and looked at me with that half-compassionate and half-contemptuous kindness which I was beginning to notice in her. She was too sharp not to be aware of how deep I had sunk in love for her, and though she was not at all elated by so insignificant a conquest, she would now and then fling me a word or look as one might throw a crust to an importunate dog.

“I have no objection,” said she carelessly, “provided Mr. Luke does not go out of his road. He may ride with me and welcome till we reach the cross-ways.”

Though I subsequently besought her to alter this decision, and to suffer me to accompany her to her own gate, she was resolute in her refusal, and when we came to the parting of the ways she turned off alone towards Lychgate leaving me gazing disconsolately after her.

I determined to keep her in sight as long as was possible, and though Chestnut was all in a lather with impatience, poor fellow, I reined him up, and stood erect in my stirrups that I might watch Dorothy's retreating form. She had not yet proceeded a hundred paces before a man's

voice rang out suddenly—"Stand and deliver!" and I saw a figure leap into the road, throwing out its hands at the same time, with the forefinger extended as though to represent a pistol. It was Sir Jocelyn; but I had barely time to recognise him before, to my horror, I saw Dorothy wheel her horse and deliberately ride him down. I well-nigh dropped from my saddle, so great was the shock, but in another moment I saw the Squire stretched upon the ground, while Fleetfoot, galloping with all speed, was already at a considerable distance. I hastened towards the spot where Sir Jocelyn lay, my heart in my mouth, in dread of what I should behold; but to my immense relief ere I could reach him he rose, turned to look after the flying horsewoman, and was dusting his coat by the time I came up.

"Oh, thank God!" I ejaculated. "You are not hurt then, Sir Jocelyn?"

"Not much," returned he, "though the road is rather hard, Friend Luke, when one comes unexpectedly in contact with it. Did you ever know a horse tread wilfully upon a man? That poor beast was not given much time for thought, but I vow he swerved when she would have had him trample me; 'twas his shoulder knocked me down."

"I suppose," I faltered—"I am sure, Sir Jocelyn, Mrs. Ullathorne must have taken you for a highwayman; as a matter of fact she carried a considerable sum about her person."

"Nothing of the kind, my good lad," he replied, still flicking away the dust with his fine cambric handkerchief. "She saw well that I carried no weapon. I took the precaution of depositing my fowling-piece yonder by the hedge lest it might fright her. I was after some wild duck, you must know, when I saw her coming this way.

No other woman sits so straight, or can boast of such a figure in these parts. I bethought me that it would be a good time to exact from her a certain payment which she owes me. 'Twas an ill-timed jest I grant you, and she had near turned it into earnest for me."

I could find nothing to say ; I knew well what penalty it was that Sir Jocelyn meant to extort ; he was most extraordinary obstinate, and, though content to bide his time, would work without ceasing to achieve any end on which he had set his heart.

Having restored the cambric to his pocket he looked up suddenly, laughing, I suppose, at my troubled face.

"Hath the idol feet of clay, after all, Friend Luke?" said he. "Can it be possible that so beautiful a damsel should not be all perfect?"

I saw that he guessed my secret and remained tongue-tied.

"What would you have said if she had killed me?" he went on banteringly. "Would you still worship that beautiful Devil?"

"How can you call her by such a name!" cried I, finding voice in my extreme indignation. "More like an avenging Angel. Did not Michael the Archangel battle with Lucifer, Sir Jocelyn? Mrs. Ullathorne doubtless thought——"

"A very pretty comparison," interrupted he with twinkling eyes. "Let us say she is an Angel by all means, my good Luke—an Archangel, if you prefer it—though 'tis scarce civil of you to allot the other character to me. I protest I meant her no harm ; she interests me much. I am in fact her devoted admirer, as devoted as you are yourself, my honest lad, but with this difference—while you consider her to be possessed of all the virtues, I have my doubts on that point ; but I like her none the less. Now

if you have a mind to ride on you can tell her that I am not a penny the worse for her kind attention, and that, so far from discouraging me, she has but increased my strength of purpose."

With that he turned, and, leaping over the low bank, repossessed himself of his fowling-piece, and walked quietly away, leaving me in doubt as to whether Mrs. Ullathorne's treatment had turned him into an over-fond friend or a deadly enemy.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PROTEST OF THE DEAD.

IN spite of my heated defence of Dorothy, and my real conviction that she had some valid excuse for her extraordinary act, being either startled by the unlooked-for apparition of Sir Jocelyn, or, in the gust of passion which had seized her, obeying a sudden impulse without any direct apprehension of what its results might be, I felt, nevertheless, a certain shyness about seeking her company. The sight of me, reminding her as it perforce must do of the recent untoward incident, would be unwelcome to her, I thought; moreover, though I loved her and believed in her to the full as much as before, I myself, for some inexplicable reason, dreaded our next meeting.

Patty brought me news concerning her from time to time. How Mrs. Ullathorne had purchased some fine dairy cows, how she was stocking the garden, how she had engaged a staff both of men and women, and was, in fact, getting matters within and without on a good working footing.

One day she told me with a somewhat puzzled expression that Mrs. Dorothy had set her folks to carry out a job which they liked not at all—to mow the rank grass in the graveyard.

“They protested, I promise you,” said Patty, “but she insisted; and when they asked for what purpose they

were to cut the grass, since it was unfit to use as hay and would bring ill luck to any beast which should eat of it, she told them that she was having it done out of respect to the dead, and that she had no mind to make use of the stuff, which they might gather into a heap, and when dry enough it might be burned."

"'Twould have been better to have left it as it lay until it dried," I remarked.

"So said they all," returned Patty, "but she would not have it so ; 'twould ill answer her purpose, said she, to have it blown about by every wind and perhaps scattered over the place ; so, by her orders, they have gathered it into a heap, and it lies on one of the flat gravestones."

About this time my Mother was confined to bed with a severe cold on the chest, and though she was blooded and blistered and other healing remedies were applied to her case, she was some time in regaining her strength.

Our Patty was, in consequence, unable to leave the house for nigh upon a fortnight ; being not only constant in her attendance in the sick-room, but weighted with many duties which did not usually fall to her share.

On the first day, however, that my Mother came downstairs the little wench hied her to Lychgate, whence she returned in a silent and anxious mood, and presently signed to me to come out of doors that she might speak with me apart.

"Only think, Luke," said she, "Dorothy is now sleeping alone o' nights in that dismal house. Malachi has gone on a journey—for important business, she says. 'Tis some time since he went, and, as you know well, the lasses go home when their work is done, as do the farm men. I believe if she had asked them they would not have consented to sleep in the place ; I begged her to do so this afternoon, but she would not."

"Why, that is very unsafe," cried I in alarm. "I wish you had stayed with her, Patty. I think my Mother could spare you now."

"I was willing to stay," cried she, "but Dorothy would have none of my company; and though I asked her to keep me, I could not help feeling rather glad that she sent me away. Eh, Luke, it would be awful to lie all night in that lonesome place—two lasses by themselves."

"And is it better, do ye think, for one lass to bide by herself?" cried I. "If I'd been you I should have stayed, Patty."

"Very fine talking!" retorted she. "I'm sure you were scared enough yourself when you heard the Ghost Coach."

"And what if it comes again?" I asked her, being unjust in my concern. "'Tis enough to drive the poor wench out of her wits to lie quaking there with not a soul at hand."

The more I dwelt on it the more uneasy did I feel on Dorothy's account. It was true that, as Patty had reported, she had already passed many nights in solitude without ill results, but that fact did not reassure me; I remembered the old adage, "The pitcher goes often to the well, but is broken at last". I could not sleep when I laid me down, but tossed on my pillow, thinking of all the possible misfortunes which might befall her. I remembered that she must still have a good deal of money in the house, as the stock which she had bought could not have cost half the sum which she carried away from my Uncle's; I thought of how easy it would be for unprincipled persons to force their way into that half-ruined place, where so many doors had lost their fastenings and so many windows were broken. I thought, in turn, of thieves, murderers, fire—in fact of every conceivable evil that might befall a defenceless girl, and, above all, of the

Ghost Coach. What if the terrible visitation recurred, and she should shriek and shriek in vain, and find none at hand to support and comfort her? Well indeed might her brain give way in her solitary agony.

I lay there quaking on her account hour after hour, until at length when the parlour clock had sounded the stroke of half after eleven I could bear it no longer. I sprang out of bed, dressed hastily, crept cautiously downstairs, and let myself out into the night.

The moon was near at the full and shone as clear as day. Our yard looked as though covered with new-fallen snow; our yellow house was, for the time, turned into marble. The stacks and trees were black in the shadow, and the hedges made bars across the whiteness of the land. I stayed not to notice these things, however, but made the best use of my legs across fields and over banks and hedges in a short cut to Lychgate. There was a slight hoar frost, and the grass and stubble were crisp to my feet, and the newly ploughed earth crumbled away beneath them. My rapid steps fell heavily, it seemed to me, with a thud, thud, that I dreaded should be heard for a long way and bring the folks at home in pursuit of me; the air sang in my ears, my heart thumped like a great drum. The twigs, with their new-budding leaves wet with the cold dew, lashed me as I leaped through them; once a blackberry bramble caught and held me, and I almost shrieked aloud, for, though I sped onwards so fast to the aid of Mrs. Dorothy, I did so in great fear.

I was in dread of the place itself, of the ill-famed house, of the churchyard with the gravestones glancing in the moonlight—I was scared of the look of them with their white edges and their black shadows, even in fancy—in dread, above all, of the Funeral Coach. I well-nigh thought

I should die if I were to hear it rumbling towards me at that hour.

I reached the lychgate at last, and shot under like an arrow from the bow, proceeding more cautiously as I approached the house lest Dorothy might discover my presence.

I had no mind to apprise her of this nocturnal visit but merely meant to patrol the place to ensure her safety from flesh-and-blood intruders and to be at hand to soothe her terrors should visitors from the other world disturb her slumbers. When I found myself at last, however, close to the house, I conquered with difficulty a violent inclination to run away. I seemed to hear a thousand sinister sounds ; to notice creeping shapes, unaccountable shadows in every corner ; but with a strong effort I composed myself and called to mind that the powers for ill could not hurt me since I had never wronged God or man that I knew of, and had come there that night with no evil intention, but simply for the protection of a defenceless and innocent girl. And then I bethought me that I need not after all be in such fear of the graveyard yonder, for they who slept there were harmless enough, aye, and had been so in life. The old monks had led, tradition said, quiet peaceable lives, serving God in their own way ; and besides them there were buried in that place for the most part simple country folks, like my forbears.

To give myself greater courage I determined to walk to the end of the enclosure and back again, that I might satisfy myself that there was indeed naught to be feared.

I turned, therefore, and boldly opened the wicket gate which led into the churchyard, threading my way among the trees.

As I advanced a sound fell upon my ears which I had

not hitherto perceived—on account, probably, of the tumult in my own mind—the sound of a spade. My heart stood still and my brain reeled, but I pressed on, clutching at the cedar trunks to support myself, for indeed I felt as if I must drop.

There, in the shadow of a great tree, and nigh to a dark heap, stood a woman's figure, digging. The tall slender shape, the streaming dark hair told me whose it was, and instantly all the evil tales I had ever heard of ghouls and witches leaped to my mind. I groaned aloud in my agony of heart, and, with a scream, Dorothy turned, dropping her spade.

I went towards her, reeling as I walked, and laid hold of her to assure myself that it was indeed she, and not some evil spirit assuming her form. The wrists I grasped twitched in mine, the pulses leaping as though with terror; the same was reflected in her face, but in spite of its starting eyes and ghastly whiteness it bore no expression of guilt.

"It is you! What brings you here at this hour?" she gasped.

"And you—what do you here among the graves at midnight?" I returned sternly.

"Are you come here to spy on me?" she cried, wrenching away her hands.

"I came to watch over you," I answered, "hearing you were alone, and fearing some evil might befall you."

Her face changed.

"I believe you love me truly, Luke," she said, "and would serve me faithfully. You come at the right moment to help me. Believe me when I tell you I am not here for any wrongful purpose, but rather to perform a duty. Ask me no questions, but since you are here, help me."

"Indeed I will," I cried earnestly, all my doubts vanishing on the instant and my heart swelling with pride and joy. "What must I do?"

"Take the spade," she returned, "and deepen that grave. I am not strong enough for the task."

Now I had liefer she had asked for some other proof of my attachment; though my heart was hot within me with eagerness I own I felt a cold shiver run down my spine as I stepped into the half-dug grave and began to shovel out the earth. I perceived as I did so that I was reopening the last resting-place of some dead sleeper, for a large flat tombstone had been pushed aside, thrown, indeed, on a dark heap of rank grass—the same, no doubt, of which Patty had spoken to me—and which had probably been placed there to conceal the operations now in progress. I felt very unwilling to carry out what I could not but think an act of desecration, and after a moment, leaning on my spade, I said as much to Dorothy.

"Oh, go on digging! Go on!" she cried impatiently. "Can you not take my word for it that I mean no ill? I am forced to use a grave already occupied lest disturbing the soil elsewhere excite suspicion. Believe me, Luke, I seek but to place in safety a precious deposit. Once this flat stone is put back again no one could guess that the grave has been tampered with."

"But surely," said I indignantly, for I could not bear her to sink below my standard of her, "you might choose some other hiding-place than a grave. A poor man's grave!"

"Luke, I bade you trust me," said she sharply. "If you will help me, do my bidding—if not, leave this place; but ask me no questions."

I fell to work again, and she paced up and down like a caged lioness, now pausing by the gate, now returning to my side, but ever in silence.

And all at once as I halted in my labour the sound I had so often conjured up in fancy that night broke in very truth on the still air : the rumbling of wheels, the heavy tread of horses' feet. I dropped my spade and clambered out of the grave, hastening towards Mrs. Dorothy, as much, I confess, for the need of companionship in my own terror as to soothe hers ; but to my surprise and alarm, instead of turning towards me she flung open the wicket and rushed down the avenue to the lychgate. I ran after her, stumbling in my fear, and the coach drew nearer, and I heard the plodding of the horse.

With a sudden sense of relief it flashed upon me that here was the tread of but a single horse, and that I could distinguish the tramping of no other feet. Moreover, the sound advanced steadily, without pause at the corner of the lane where the cross stood, and presently, mustering up courage to glance over the wall, I saw a dark shape moving towards us. The bright moonlight revealed to me that here was no funeral coach, no coach of any kind in fact, but rather a light wagon or hooded cart, such as is used among country folks.

I turned to Dorothy, and was about to speak, but at sight of her face the words died on my lips. Her eyes were dilated, yet I could not think with fear—rather with a devouring anxiety and expectancy ; her lips moved as though in prayer, and her hands were clasped. I seemed to know in gazing at her that she was awaiting some immediate and important tidings.

The cart was close at hand now, and it was with no surprise that I recognised in the driver the strongly marked face and crooked form of Malachi. He drew up at the gate and alighted.

"Is all well?" gasped Dorothy ; it seemed to me that I could hear her dry tongue clacking as she spoke.

"Aye, I've got 'un in the wagon," answered Malachi. "What's yon fellow doing here?" he asked in a lower tone.

"Have no fear," she returned, almost in a whisper; "he knows nothing, but is willing to help us."

"'Tis just as well," grunted Malachi. "I was wondering how we should manage."

He went to the horse's head and half turned the wagon round so that its rear faced the gateway; then coming back he hailed me gruffly: "Lend a hand here!"

I went to him, noticing, as I passed Dorothy, that she leaned against the masonry of the gate as though overwhelmed by emotion or weakness.

From within the darkness of the cart Malachi began to draw forth what seemed to be a box, or chest, and, I helping him, we soon got it to the ground. It was of some length, and at first startled me, for I thought it might be a coffin, but I speedily saw it was not shaped like one; moreover, when we came to lift it, its weight was not such as to justify my first supposition. Dorothy, recovering herself, walked on before us, somewhat unsteadily but without looking back, and Malachi and I followed with our burden.

Now I scarce expect to be believed in my account of what followed; I can only most solemnly assert this to be the truth. I was, no doubt, extremely fearful and excited, but in the full possession of my senses, and quite capable of distinguishing fact from fancy.

Mrs. Dorothy opened the wicket gate and passed through, followed as before by Malachi and myself; but no sooner had we set our feet among the graves than a faint cry made us all start. A series of cries, I should say, for they appeared to increase in strength and number till what had at first resembled the wailing of a child

became at length a clamour which filled the air. It seemed to be all round us, rising from our feet, ringing in our ears, mounting to the very sky. It was like nothing human, and on hearing it there came upon me such a frenzy of terror as I pray God may never again fall to my lot.

I dropped my end of the box and staggered back, voiceless from sheer extremity of fear, but Dorothy clutched my arm.

"Where would you go?" murmured she, in tones that I scarce recognised as hers, for she too was withering in dread. "Would you leave us *now*?"

With an effort I managed to reply in a hoarse whisper:—

"Let me go!—let me go! I will have no part in this profanation. Do you not hear—the very dead are crying out against it?"

I believed, indeed, that the decent dead who slumbered in that place were revolting with one accord against the desecration of the consecrated ground.

She clasped her hands: "God will forgive me," she cried. "God sees there is no malice in my heart."

There had seemed to come a kind of lull in the storm of sound, and because I was partly reassured by this, and by what she said, and because I was loth to leave her in her need, I stooped, and again laid hold of the chest; but with the first step I took the dreadful turmoil began again, and again I was shaken with a passion of fear.

Once more loosing my burden I turned and fled, with those unearthly cries still, as it seemed, pursuing me; I fled as one flies in an evil dream, the very ground seeming to heave and billow under my feet, my limbs giving way beneath me, my head swimming. Yet, as I rushed

through the lychgate, I saw the wagon still standing where it had been left, and noted how the horse was cropping the hedge on the opposite side of the lane. Over that hedge I scrambled, and across one field and then another, and another, and when at last I slackened my pace I found myself in the midst of my Father's placid flock, with the pale light of day beginning to dawn.

CHAPTER VII.

MASTER ROBERT CHAPTERS THE NEW TENANT.

THERE was little sleep for me for the remainder of that night ; in fact I spent the greater portion of the time that intervened before morning in washing me and removing all traces of mould from my shoes and clothes. I felt almost as one might feel who had committed a murder and concealed the corpse, and, in my dread of discovery, laved my hands again and again, and swilled my face and even my hair. I can never describe the shame and anguish of mind I felt in thinking of my desertion of Dorothy in her hour of need ; her voice seemed to ring in my ears —“Would you leave us now?” Oh! she would have a right to scorn and despise me for evermore ; and yet I knew that, were I to find myself in the same quandary again, I should act in the like way. Flesh and blood could not stand up against the powers of the other world.

I dared not judge Dorothy's own conduct ; had any other person been in question I should have deemed the deed on which she was bent, and which I felt certain she would carry out, most wicked and sacrilegious. What could be that treasure which she sought to secure, even in the sacred precincts of the dead? What motive could justify the violation of a grave? I turned dizzy and sick as I dwelt on it ; yet anon I would recall the earnestness with which she had cried out—“God sees my heart—God will forgive me!”

Who was I that I should condemn her?

How glad I was to hear the folks stirring about the place when daylight came—the good, warm, spring daylight that made the fields look green again, and set the birds a-singing. I threw open my window and leaned out into the fresh air. Stumpy was crossing the yard with a sack on his back; Susan and Dolly were clattering their pails in the dairy; the lad Robin was driving up the cows from pasture. I heard Patty singing in the next room to mine as she drove away the sleep from her eyes with cold spring water. I vowed to forget the hateful business of the night, and, falling on my knees beside the casement, prayed God for a blessing on the new day which, through His mercy, I had lived to see.

Nevertheless I was not myself for nigh upon a week, sleeping little and eating less, so that my Mother concluded I must have the toothache.

Patty went to Lychgate on the day following my adventure there, and I could not forbear asking her on her return if she found Mrs. Dorothy well.

“Yes; well enough,” replied our Patty; “so she says, at least, but she looks as if she had not slept for a s’en-night. I doubt she was a bit afraid o’ nights while Malachi was away—he’s back now, thou knows.”

“Oh, is he?” said I.

“Yes, he came back early this morning. He has brought her a many little oddments for the house—so many that he had to hire a wagon to bring them. China and such like—and a clock; and a settle for the parlour.”

I thought to myself that these things had been purchased merely to disarm suspicion should folks be curious to know the nature of Malachi’s load.

“I reckon,” said I aloud, with as careless an air as I could make pretence of, “I reckon that heap of hay in

the graveyard is burnt by now. It must be dry enough, and 'tis something unseemly to leave it lying there."

"Nay," said Patty, rising to my bait, "nay, 'tisn't burnt yet. I saw it lying still in a great pile as I passed to-day."

"The wind 'ull blow it all over the place," I went on artfully. "Those storms we had must have scattered the stuff all among the graves."

"Not at all," returned the little wench. "It lays there quite neat and shapely on the big flat stone, where it has been ever since it was cut."

"The deed's done, then," said I to myself, "and all put in order about the spot so that no trace remains."

"I reckon," continued Patty, "it lays there so long because the lads are loth to go near the place. Not one of them will set foot in it if they can help it; they were ill-enough pleased with the mowing."

I nodded and said no more, but I thought within myself that, putting aside the question of right and wrong, Mrs. Dorothy had been wise in her selection of a hiding-place.

After the memorable Sunday on which Dorothy had excited Lady Gillibrand's anger she had adopted our ways in the matter of waiting for her Ladyship to depart before proceeding homewards; partly, I fancy, that she might prove to Sir Jocelyn that she was not ashamed or afraid to meet him, in spite of their encounter on the road. On the Sunday following that event she had stood nigh enough to the path for him almost to brush against her, and he had paused and saluted her with a low bow, and a glance of admiration, whether real or feigned I could not guess. She, in her turn, had curtsied low; and this mode of procedure was repeated every week until the Sunday after that terrible midnight scene.

I noticed that Dorothy looked pale and ill that day, and that she never raised her eyes from her book ; she had no heart, I think, to enact the usual little comedy, but fled from the Church at the conclusion of the Service, and was out of sight by the time the rest of us appeared.

Lady Gillibrand was much incensed at her again transgressing in this manner, and took my Parents severely to task for it, in spite of their being unable to furnish her with any information which might throw light on the subject.

"I shall send my Cousin, Master Bilsborough, to re-monstrate with Mrs. Ullathorne no later than to-morrow," remarked her Ladyship severely. "I would go myself but that I and all my good women will be busy preparing for the Flowering of the great Marl-pit. But my Cousin Bilsborough shall take her to task ; he shall chapter her, I promise you."

No sooner had the coach taken its departure than I shot off in pursuit of Dorothy, whom I presently overtook ; turning at sound of my advancing feet she cast upon me a look of wrathful contempt, and pursued her way without further pause.

I hurried up to her and ventured to lay a restraining hand upon her sleeve.

"Pray, Madam," said I very humbly, "will you not permit me to carry your books?"

"You are very ready, Master Wright," said she, coming to a standstill and surveying me scornfully ; "you are very ready, I perceive, to offer your services when you are sure that you may do so with perfect safety."

"Madam," I faltered, in great distress, "I know you think me cowardly——"

"In truth I do," returned she, wheeling as if to walk on again.

"You do well to be angry with me," I pursued ; "you cannot be more angry with me than I am with myself. I know not how to excuse the panic which came upon me. Yet surely you must yourself confess that it was next to impossible not to lose one's head in the midst of that fearful outcry."

"Malachi stood by me," said she. "Pray do not distress yourself to come out of your way any further, Master Wright ; I have no need of fair-weather friends, I thank you."

I turned away very crestfallen and made my way homewards, being glad enough to come up presently with Patty, who had been loitering on her journey through the fields.

"Would she have none of you, my poor Luke?" asked she, with an arch look.

"She sent me about my business," I returned, recovering in some measure my composure, and endeavouring to make light of my disappointment.

As we walked home together, Patty said, laughingly, that she should take care to be present while Master Robert lectured Mrs. Dorothy on the morrow.

"I doubt he'll get the worst of it !" cried she ; "and I'll wager with the first sharp word that Dorothy says he'll change his tune pretty quick. I don't like Master Robert, Luke."

"Nor I," said I.

"He is like a cur dog, all bark and fury if he thinks you fear him, but ready to cower and lick your hand if you stand up to him. It turns my stomach to hear his gross flattery of those whom he thinks may be of service to him. Do you mind how he cringed to my Father when he sought to persuade him to let him use Fleetfoot at the horse race ? Yet how he bullied poor John Lupton

when he failed at the boon-ploughing, because he knew the poor old lad was down in the world and went in fear of being driven from his little farm. And oh, Luke, to see him fawn upon Sir Jocelyn ! Sir Jocelyn has no liking for him, I can tell you, for all that."

"Now how can you tell?" I returned. "His own Cousin ! For shame of you to say such a thing !"

I thought her tongue was wagging too free, and felt it would be some satisfaction to put her in her place, my own recent rebuff rendering me doubly desirous to assert myself. "I am sure Sir Jocelyn is always mighty civil to Master Robert," I went on.

"His own Cousin, indeed !" quoth she. "Kinship does not always breed love, Master Luke. Aye, truly, Sir Jocelyn is wonderful civil to his Cousin, but doesn't thou see how he mocks him with it all? Why, I have seen Master Bilsborough go red with wrath at times and bite his lip, and just when, to all seeming, Sir Jocelyn was naught but kindness."

"Well," said I, "it ill becomes us to abuse our betters on a Sunday morning, Patty ; I think our tongues could be more wisely employed."

"Very well, then," retorted she, "I'll not employ my tongue to-morrow in telling you what falls out at Lychgate when Master Bilsborough visits there. After all, 'tis idle to gossip of our neighbour's affairs, is it not, virtuous Master Luke?"

Now 'twas more to tease Patty than to make any great parade of wisdom that I had taken her to task, and also because I thought it well to set her down from time to time, for, though not yet seventeen, the little wench had as many airs of late as if she had been a woman, and considered herself as much entitled to form opinions and pass judgments as myself. But I was, nevertheless,

somewhat chagrined at this new-formed resolution, for I sorely desired to hear how Dorothy bore Master Robert's lecturing ; during the remainder of the day, therefore, I was extremely civil to Patty, and lost no opportunity of obliging her.

It was, however, more, I think, because she felt the need of a confidant, than from any wish to gratify my curiosity, that she consented on the following day to give me an account of what took place at Lychgate.

"I went over early," said she, "to warn Dorothy of Master Robert's coming ; and first she said she would not see him, and then bethought her that it would seem cowardly to keep away. So she made some preparation to receive him—changing her working-gown for her silk one and dressing her hair. She was like a Queen—but for all that she looks ill, Luke," cried Patty, breaking off.

"No wonder!" exclaimed I, and then I recollected myself and went on, "I mean I am concerned to hear it."

"Master Robert walked in, all smiles," said Patty, without noticing my interruption, "and Dorothy curtsied very low and stiff. 'Pray be seated, Sir'—'I thank you, Madam' (the little wench was aping the scene). 'I have called, Madam, on a matter—a little matter—I have called by the desire of my Kinswoman, Lady Gillibrand'——'I am suprised, Sir, that Lady Gillibrand should desire you to call, since I informed her that it was my wish to receive no visitors.' 'Oh, Madam,' cries he, with his head on one side and such a silly sickly grin—I vow I could have smacked his face—'Oh, Madam, do not be so cruel as to say my presence is unwelcome to you. I vow I count myself among your most devoted admirers. From the moment I first beheld you, my heart was ravished from my bosom'—'Pray, Sir,' says Dorothy,

'is this what Lady Gillibrand requested you to say?' 'No indeed,' returned he, looking extremely foolish. 'Then oblige me by proceeding to the point,' said Dorothy—Thou knows how she can look when she is beginning to be angered?"

"I know," said I; I had good cause indeed, her wrath having so recently fallen upon me.

"He hemmed and he hawed," continued Patty, with great enjoyment, "and she waited a bit, and at last looked at the clock. 'I am afraid,' said she, 'my time is limited.' 'My Cousin, Lady Gillibrand,' burst out Master Robert, all of a hurry, 'was much disturbed to find that you were obliged to leave the Church with such haste last Sunday; she—she—she feared you might be indisposed.'"

Wicked little Patty! How she mimicked Master Robert's terrified look and stammering tongue.

"'Pray reassure her Ladyship,' said Dorothy; 'I was perfectly well. Is that all?'—'That—that is all,' says he, with his eyes half-starting from his head, 'except,' he added, unbethinking himself all at once, 'I hope—at least, I am sure her Ladyship hopes—I mean we all most certainly hope that you will honour us by attending the Flowering of the great Marl-pit, which is to take place on Thursday week amid general rejoicings.' She shook her head and up she got. 'I am obliged to you—to her Ladyship—to all from whom may proceed this invitation,' answered she, imitating his own hesitating speech, 'but I regret that I must decline it. A mourner like myself has no place at merry-makings.' Then, as she stood there by the door, Master Bilsborough was forced to get up and take his leave. I wonder what kind of tale he carried to her Ladyship—I doubt he'll say naught about the invitation to the Flowering."

"But will she not come indeed?" asked I. "Patty, ask my Mother to persuade her. 'Twill give such sore offence to all the neighbours if she keeps away."

"Aye, and to her Ladyship too," agreed Patty, "for, though she did not mean Master Robert to be the bearer of the message at such a time, I feel sure she will take it in very evil part if Mrs. Dorothy does not join the feast like the rest of the tenants."

Patty, I suppose, reported to my Mother something of what had passed, and being now recovered, my Mother made it her business to call upon our neighbour and reason with her on the resolution she had taken. On her return from Lychgate she related to us that Dorothy had yielded to her persuasions.

"I told her," said my Mother, highly elated, good simple woman, at her success, "I told her how unwise 'twould be for a newcomer to make herself so singular. Said I—'Tis sure to set folks talking, my dear, and to get you a bad name in the place. From far and near the folks are coming to the Flowering of our Marl-pit. And you such a big tenant and all, Sir Jocelyn would take it very ill—and her Ladyship—I doubt 'twould set her Ladyship against you'—'And what do I care for that?' cries she. 'Ah, my dear,' says I, 'when all's said and done 'tis better to make friends nor foes. When her Ladyship turns against anybody in this place they generally have to shift soon or late. Sir Jocelyn does her bidding in most things, and though he'd be loth to turn you out, I'm sure'——'But could he turn me out?' says she, lookin' a bit scared. 'Haven't I taken the place on a regular agreement?'——'Is there any writin' to it then?' says I. 'The most of us in these parts has no leases. 'Tis just settled by word o' mouth, and the land goes down fro' father to son as comfortable as can be. But

you, bein' a newcomer, Mrs. Dorothy,' says I, 'and givin' no references I understand—eh, love,' I said, takin' her by the hand, 'make yourself a bit obligin' to her Ladyship, do now. We're all real fond on you, and 'ud be sorry to lose you.' She thought a bit, and then she said she thanked me for my advice, and she'd take it, and when I told her, Patty, as you was to gather flowers for the garlands next week, and how 'twas settled you was to take all you could find to the Hall, and that you reckoned to help to dress the garlands in the great barn, she asked me very kind if ye had as many flowers as ye wanted. So I told her no, not as many as you'd like, nobbut common flowers, such as laylock and gillyfers and primroses and that, so she said you was to go to her place and pick her tulips and butter-and-eggs, and anything else you could find."

"Eh, that is kind," cried Patty, clapping her hands, "I was fair ashamed to think o' bringing naught but such ordinary flowers. I can reckon on plenty of cowslips and abundance of primroses, but the bluebells isn't out yet."

When I subsequently questioned Patty as to her doings at Lychgate and Ferneby Hall, I gathered that she found Dorothy in an unusually gentle mood, that she had asked very prettily if she might join our family at the Flowering of the Squire's Marl-pit, and had sent her away loaded with all the wealth of her garden.

"Her Ladyship was pleased," went on the little wench, "when I brought her such fine flowers, and told her where they came from, and she said, very graciously, she was glad to hear Mrs. Dorothy was coming to the feast. And Sir Jocelyn himself came into the big barn where we was all a-gate o' dressin' the garlands, and asked me where I got my flowers from; so I told him, and eh,

he did look pleased! 'That was very pretty of Mrs. Ullathorne,' says he. 'I hope she intends to join us on Thursday.' 'Yes indeed,' said I, 'she hopes to have the pleasure of coming with us, Sir Jocelyn.' Then he smiled. 'Is she in a better temper?' says he. 'Eh,' says I, 'I think she's more cheerful-like. She's seen a good bit o' trouble, I reckon, Sir Jocelyn, and trouble makes folks cranky.' 'You're a good little soul,' says he, and then he picks up a two-three of Dorothy's butter-and-eggs and makes them into a posy for his coat."

Had it not been for this last item I should have been well pleased at Patty's tale; 'twas surely a good thing for Sir Jocelyn and his tenant to be on peaceable terms. But why should he choose to make a posy of her flowers, when he had so many of his own?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE UNKNOWN GALLANT.

I USUALLY put up my horse at the Nag's Head at Upton, the charges being lower than at the Crown, where, moreover, they occasionally were so overcrowded that they had no room for him; but on the day before the Flowering so many folks from distant villages had taken up their quarters there that I was forced to stable Chestnut at the post-house. Here travellers of a different quality baited, and for the most part continued their journey after a few hours, and the ceremony of the morrow brought Landlord Billington no increase of custom.

On turning into the yard to seek my beast I found the stablemen busy, and the chief ostler attending to the needs of a handsome brown horse, from which a gentleman had evidently just alighted. He was a stranger, and had apparently ridden far, for he and his horse looked weary and both were splashed with mud. He was a slender, tall man, dressed in a plain dark riding suit, and wearing his own hair, which was of so bright a colour that it flamed in the evening sun, tied back with a black ribbon. His fine pale face was cut as clear as the face of a statue.

"I will be with you in a minute, Mr. Luke," cried Jim the ostler, "or I'll give a shout to one of the other lads if ye like."

"I'm in no hurry, thank ye, Jim," said I. "Pray do not hurry with this gentleman's horse—'tis as bonny a

one as ever I saw," said I, turning to its master, "and deserves good treatment."

"Why, yes, I believe he does," returned he, with a pleasant smile. "He has carried me many a mile to-day, and yesterday too for that matter. I always make it a point of seeing to his comfort before I touch bite or sup myself."

"A good rule, Sir," said I. ("Wash his legs down well, Jim—they're fair caked with mud.") "These good friends of ours are dumb, when all's said and done, and cannot protest if they are ill done to."

"My horse can almost speak, though," said the newcomer. "Cannot you, Star?"

Hearing his name the horse turned his head and uttered a gentle whinny, and I saw that he had a white star on his forehead, though the rest of him was of a most beautiful dark dappled brown. I stepped up to him to pat him and noticed a small white patch just behind his shoulder, not much bigger than a shilling, but nevertheless a blemish; I remarked upon this to his owner, and he laughed and said:—

"Yes; a worthless fellow of a groom, that I had once, rode him carelessly out of his stable, grazing him against the sharp latch of the door; it would scarce be noticed, however, and after all even a blemish may be of service. Were Star stolen I could easily identify him."

We stood by, chatting together until the horse was comfortably installed for the night. I asked my new acquaintance, during this time, if he intended to pursue his journey on the morrow, and he said, with a careless air, that that depended upon circumstances. If he found the inn comfortable he might stay a day or two so as to give his horse a thorough rest. That part of the world was new to him, he said, and it would interest him to see something of the country.

"The gentleman ought to go to the Flowering of Ferneby Marl-pit—oughtn't he, Mester Luke?" said Jim, pausing in the midst of the hissing and swishing with which he was accompanying the rubbing down of Star. "'Twill be a gradely sight—the like hasn't been seen these twenty years, they say. The folks is comin' fro' far and near, an' they'll keep up the dancin' as long as there's a lass or lad to foot it."

"Pooh, Jim!" returned I, "the gentleman wouldn't care for country sports. 'Twould give you little pleasure, Sir, I fancy," I went on, turning to him, "to see a lot of country folks jiggig round a marl-pit, however well-flowered it might be."

"Nay," said he, "I think it would interest me. I have never heard of such a custom. Pray, what is a marl-pit, and what is this talk of flowering it?"

"Eh, dear, you mun be simple!" broke in Jim, with rude amusement. "'What's a marl-pit?' says he. Why, 'tis a big hole as they gets marl from for dressin' the fields."

"The land in these parts," explained I, "is somewhat light and sandy, and is much improved by marl being spread over it, particularly where woods have formerly grown. It is the custom when the work has been carried out to hold sports in and about the pits whence the marl was taken, principally for the reward and recreation of the folks employed in the business, and of the neighbouring tenantry. This pit of Sir Jocelyn Gillibrand's is a particularly large one, and he has employed a many workmen, so that the rejoicings are to be on a great scale, for 'tis to be May Day and the Flowering in one. As a rule we flower the pits and wells and such-like on St. John's Day, but Sir Jocelyn has a fancy for keepin' the two feasts to-morrow. They are to have a Maypole

and Morris Dancers and such-like ; and the Marling-folk are to walk in procession, carrying garlands, and there is to be a great wreath of flowers all round the pit, and there is to be a feast for the common folk, and I don't know what all."

"Merry doings indeed !" quoth he. "I have a mind to go and look at them, if one may do so without an invitation. I have not, unfortunately, the honour of Sir Jocelyn Gillibrand's acquaintance."

"Bless ye, Sir," cried Jim, before I could answer ; "ye needn't wait to be lathed to go to a Marling Feast. The whole countryside 'ull turn out, I'll uphold you, and not one man in fifty will ha' been bid to it. I'm going mysel'," said Jim conclusively, "if the Gaffer 'ull gie me a day off."

"That settles the question, surely," remarked the stranger, with a twinkle in his eyes.

He had blue eyes, but dark brows, which looked strange by contrast with the colour of his skin and of his hair. He turned to me next :—

"While your horse is being saddled, Sir," said he, "will you do me the honour to drink with me ?"

"With all my heart," said I, much flattered by his tone, and we went together to a private room in the inn, where the gentleman ordered a bottle of claret. Poor sour stuff, enough, I thought it, and would have preferred a good tankard of the ale for which the Crown was famous, but I was loth to display my uncultivated taste to this very fine gentleman, and therefore lifted my glass with my head on one side and one eye closed, as I had often-times seen fashionable travellers do when they sipped their liquor in token of extreme satisfaction.

"We must have a toast," said the Stranger ; and then he looked me full in the eyes and continued, "I drink to *Her !*"

"Hear! Hear!" said I, "to Her by all means." And I set my lips to the glass.

"Wait a bit," cried he, throwing out his hand, "let us be agreed on this point. Whose health do you propose to drink, Sir?"

"Why—Hers, I suppose," stammered I. "The lady you have in your mind."

"And have you no lady in your mind?" inquired he. And then he laughed and threw himself back in his chair. "Why what a simpleton I am to talk thus! Whom should an honest young yeoman have in his mind but some rosy-cheeked Queen of the dairy or such-like? Come, let us drink the health of your Sukey or Betty or whatever her name may be."

"I give you Dorothy, then," cried I, nettled by his manner, which had suddenly altered.

"Dorothy!" he exclaimed, springing up from his chair. "Dorothy! An unusual name in these parts surely."

"Oh, aye," said I, "uncommon enough."

He dropped back again into his former position, gazing at me through half-shut eyes.

"Let us drink to Dorothy!" said he, toying with his glass and, after a moment, taking it up and bowing towards me. "Mrs. Dorothy, pretty Mrs. Dorothy—Shall we not give her her full title?—there may be a thousand Dorothys scattered over the world, but we must drink to one. Come, what is her surname? There can be no indiscretion in telling me, a perfect stranger, who will never set eyes on the lady, and who in all probability will never exchange a word with yourself again."

But I shook my head with a sage air.

"I cannot gratify you, Sir," said I. "I don't think the names of women should be bandied about. Now let us drink the health, if you please, for I must be gone."

He swallowed the contents of his glass with a listless air and would have refilled mine, but that I begged him to excuse me. He permitted me to take leave of him, and accompanied me to the door, where he was kind enough to bestow some words of admiration on Chestnut. I rode away feeling oddly attracted and interested by the personality of my new acquaintance, which I had gladly prosecuted further; though his air and manner denoted that he was considerably above me in station, he had been good enough to treat me almost as an equal, and I had fain seen more of him. Yet something in the tone in which he bade me farewell warned me that even were he to be a spectator of the sports on the morrow he had no wish to renew our intercourse.

Immediately after breakfast next morning I went to fetch Mrs. Dorothy, taking the precaution to place a pillion on Chestnut to save her the extra two miles' walk between Lychgate and The Delf; for she had informed my Mother she meant to proceed to the Flowering, like the rest of us, on foot.

I suppose in spite of her scorn of our rustic merry-making she felt, nevertheless, some small measure of excitement, for I vow she never looked so bonny. She wore a grey taffety mantua and quilted satin petticoat, and instead of a hat a cap trimmed with some wonderful fine lace. It sat well on her dark hair, and the soft light colour of her coat suited her to admiration. I wore my best blue suit, too, I mind, and had a posy in my coat, and another in my hat, and as we rode away together from Lychgate I saw one or two men that were at work in the neighbouring field nudge each other, and I knew they thought us a bonny couple.

My Mother and Father stood awaiting us in our own yard, with Patty and Johnny, all ready to set forth and

all mighty fine for the occasion—Patty wore abundance of blue ribbons and a posy of forget-me-nots. There was naught but blue and white about her, indeed, if one may except brown curls and red lips, for I am sure her eyes looked as blue as her own forget-me-nots that day.

Dismounting, and assisting Mrs. Dorothy to alight, I tossed my reins with a lordly air to Stumpy, and bade him look to my beast; and he led away Chestnut, grumbling that a body would think nobody wanted to go a-pleasuring but themselves—for he, too, was in haste to get to the feast.

We set out in two parties of three, my Father and Mother, as usual, leading Johnny by the hand, and what a shrill din of happiness did the little lad keep up, to be sure, all the way! That tongue of his wagged ceaselessly, and now and then he would break from his parents and run a little way ahead, and then, just as they had got into quiet converse with each other, returned to them, seizing with either hand one of theirs and interrupting their talk with his prattle.

I would fain have given an arm to both Dorothy and Patty, but the little wench said impudently that she preferred to walk by Dorothy's side, and I protest she behaved nigh as foolishly as Johnny, who, to be sure, was but a child, and could not be expected to have great store of good sense; there was no such excuse for Patty, and when she interrupted my discourse with Mrs. Dorothy with some babble about the birds, or the sky, or the green trees, or else with senseless merriment, I confess she angered me. For after all, as I pointed out to her, there was nothing marvellous about the singing of the birds, and 'twas not at all strange that the sky should be blue and the leaves green since that was the first of May, when such things were to be expected;

and that she should laugh for pure gladness of heart was all very well, but then she should have fallen behind and laughed by herself, instead of interrupting other folks' conversation. But to this day Patty will never own that I was justly aggrieved, for, she says, I was as cross myself as a bear with a sore head.

As soon as we turned into the road we met numbers of people coming from all parts it seemed, and hastening in the same direction as ourselves. Many had come from a distance in wagons or carts ; some rode a-horseback with their wives or daughters behind them, but for the most part they came on foot, and would presently dance none the less merrily for having already trudged several miles. Faces were hot and shoes dusty, but all were merry. A good few, as I have already said, had come more than a day's journey and lain for the night at the Nag's Head ; these were fresh and cool enough, and jeered at others of their kinsfolk and neighbours who had travelled nearly as far but had been on the road since day-break or even earlier.

As we neared the great Marl-pit, which was pleasantly situated in a field well sheltered at the further end by a wood, the sound of music fell upon our ears. The piper was already playing to the folks while they were waiting for the procession to arrive.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FLOWERING OF THE MARL-PIT.

NEVER in all my days, I think, did I witness so merry and bonny a sight as the Flowering of Sir Jocelyn Gillibrand's Marl-pit. The place was thronged with folks who kept arriving and arriving, till there was scarce standing-room in the centre of the field ; but my Father and I, being taller and bigger than most, tucked our womenfolk under our elbows and forced our way to the front. Mrs. Patty did not disdain to take my arm then ! All round the pit was a great garland of flowers of most elegant device ; they looked, indeed, as if they were growing, and hard by the pit but far enough away to allow plenty of dancing-room was the tallest and the finest Maypole I have ever seen, wreathed round and round with flowers, and with gay ribbons of different hues hanging from it.

The Marling-folk presently arrived walking in procession, wearing head-dresses of flowers, and carrying each of them a musket ; then came six garlands borne by young women walking two and two, themselves very gay with flowers ; next came eight Sword Dancers, and then the Morris Dancers cutting strange capers, and all decked out with ribbons and hawks' bells, which made a merry music. They brought their own pipe and tabor, too, so that there was no lack of tunes.

They marched along with great solemnity, pausing

before a wagon which had been drawn nigh to one side of the pit, and on which were arranged seats for Sir Jocelyn, Lady Gillibrand and sundry of their friends among the Quality, and the foremost of the Marlers made a kind of rhyming speech thanking Sir Jocelyn for his bounty, and wishing him good luck and prosperity with his newly-dressed land. Then the pipes and fiddles struck up, and the Sword Dancers, descending to the bottom of the pit, performed many curious exercises therein, all the folks pressing round to see, and being kept back from trampling on the flowers by a number of stewards, who laid about them sharply with their white staves.

I was staring from side to side, almost dazed with the novelty of the sight, and with the din of voices and laughter, and with the hum of the pipes and the screech of the fiddle, when I heard a voice close to me. It was Master Robert Bilsborough, and he addressed Mrs. Dorothy.

"Madam," said he, "the dancing is now about to begin; it is customary on these occasions for my Cousin and his family to lead off with a select few, who will perform a country dance at the bottom of the pit yonder; it has been well drained and sodded, and this rustic floor will, I think, be not unpleasant to the feet. Pray, may I request you to honour me by being my partner?"

"I am much obliged to you, Sir, but it is not my purpose to dance, I thank you," replied Dorothy coldly.

"Surely," returned he with a leer, which he doubtless intended to be ingratiating, but which to my mind was exceeding impudent, "surely, Madam, you will not be so cruel. What! The belle of the countryside refuse to exhibit herself to her multitude of adorers! I vow there's not a man here but must lose his heart at sight of so

much beauty and grace. And why, Madam," he went on in the same affected tone, "why should I be the only one to suffer—do but consent to come forward so that I may at least have the satisfaction of knowing myself to be but in the same plight as every other unfortunate male who views you."

Dorothy was about to make some haughty reply, being, as I saw, very much offended by his manner, when she was accosted by Sir Jocelyn, who had approached her from the other side.

"We are about to begin the dancing, Mrs. Ullathorne," said he; "will you oblige me by standing up with me?"

"Nay, now; nay, now!" cried Master Robert sniggering, "'tis not fair, I protest, for the Lord of the Manor to endeavour to supplant his poor Kinsman. I had myself but just petitioned Mrs. Ullathorne for the honour of her hand."

"I fear my humble Kinsman must be content to step on one side," returned Sir Jocelyn, in the half-good-humoured, half-contemptuous tone with which he generally addressed his Cousin, "for it is my intention to persist in offering this slight tribute of respect to a lady whom I so highly esteem."

He looked at Mrs. Dorothy as he spoke, with real kindness, and his manner was so entirely devoid of the offensive freedom which had characterised Master Robert's that Dorothy cast at him a troubled look, being partly, I think, smitten with compunction for her recent treatment of him, and partly moved by this evidence of his goodwill and generosity, yet at the same time reluctant to grant his request.

At this moment, however, the arrival of Mrs. Penelope, clinging breathlessly to Doctor Francis Bradley's arm—that good gentleman having previously been hon-

oured with a place on her Ladyship's wagon out of regard, I presume, to his constant and faithful attendance in a medical capacity—Mrs. Penelope, I say, hurried up and twitched Sir Jocelyn by the sleeve.

"Pray, Sir Jocelyn," panted she, "do her Ladyship the favour of going to her at once. It is time for the dance to begin, she says, and she wishes you to delay no longer in leading out your partner."

"Exactly what I am about to do," returned her Cousin.

"Her Ladyship thinks—your Mother thinks," stammered Mrs. Penny, "that you ought to lead off the dance with Dame Wilmot. She will herself select John Lunt—'tis the custom, as you know, to lead the dance with the oldest tenants on her property. Her Ladyship says she is sure you will not forget this."

"A foolish old custom," returned he, smiling. "I am about to make a new rule. 'Tis the youngest tenant the Lord of the Manor should dance with, my dear Penny—and, moreover, 'tis fitting I think to honour most those who have but newly come amongst us."

And with that he turned with a bow and a smile towards Mrs. Dorothy.

"But I am sure, Cousin Jocelyn, my Lady bade me send you to her at once," cried poor Penny. "Did she not, Doctor Bradley? The Doctor heard her say she wanted you, Cousin Jocelyn?"

"Yes, indeed," assented the Doctor, who was a big man, somewhat reserved in his manner, and chary of words; 'twas perhaps for these reasons that Lady Gillibrand was so fond of consulting him, for as her vapours more often than not proceeded from a fit of the tantrums, after she had poured forth her grievances his sage look and silent shake of the head might be construed in divers ways—sympathy with herself, condemnation of the delinquent

(whomsoever he or she might be), concern for her state of health—any meaning, in fact, which she chose to read into them.

"Her Ladyship is beckoning to you now, Cousin Jocelyn," exclaimed Penny, almost in tears, and glancing fearfully towards the wagon, from which indeed Lady Gillibrand, standing erect, was making repeated signs to her Son.

"I fear that this time she will be disappointed," answered he. "Go back to her, my good Penny, and tell her I shall be happy to attend her at the conclusion of the dance; that she is welcome to lead off with John Lunt, but that I myself pay my duty elsewhere."

And with that he extended his hand gracefully to Mrs. Dorothy, who laid hers lightly in it; she had been more than woman, I think, if she had resisted the temptation of setting her Ladyship's will at naught. The crowd fell back as Sir Jocelyn led his partner down the rude steps cut in the soil to the bottom of the pit, where they were presently joined by Lady Gillibrand and honest old John Lunt, who did not seem to be enjoying himself over much, and Mrs. Penny and Doctor Bradley. Master Robert, after sending a scowling glance at the retreating form of his kinsman, informed our Patty, superciliously, that she might dance with him; whereupon that little hussy, looking mighty demure, but privately nipping my arm, returned that she was already promised to me.

"And I understand," she continued, still looking as if butter would not melt in her mouth, "that the gentry are to honour the oldest tenants—and there is Goody Lupton looking for a partner!"

"Well," said I, as soon as we were out of earshot, "you are an impudent piece, Mrs. Patty. How do you know that I want to dance with you?"

"For that matter," replied she, very pat, "I have no mind to dance with you if I can find somebody better. 'Tis dull work dancing with one's own folks; but I did not want to dance with Master Robert. Thou knows I hate him."

At this moment we encountered poor Mrs. Penny making her way upwards with a crestfallen look.

"Oh, Master Wright, would you be so obliging as to find me a partner?" she inquired dolefully. "Her Ladyship will not suffer me to dance with Doctor Bradley; it is her wish that I should stand up with one of the tenants. There is poor Doctor Bradley wandering about also in search of a partner."

"Why," said Patty, half-roguishly, half-diffidently, "we two are in the same plight. Luke, here, would be honoured if you would accept of him, would not you, Luke? And if his Honour, Doctor Bradley, would not despise myself ——"

"I'm sure he would be delighted, Patty," said Mrs. Penny, brightening a little. "I shall be very happy indeed to dance with you, Master Luke, for indeed I know not where else to look for a partner. I will sign to Doctor Bradley to come here, Patty—he is a most admirable performer," added the poor lady with a sigh, "and a most interesting companion."

We thus paired off for the second time, and as twenty couples were by now assembled at the bottom of the pit, where there was not space for more, her Ladyship gave the signal for the music to strike up, and we began.

It was the old dance—the Triumph—and a pretty graceful measure it is, and surely never trod with greater perfection than by Sir Jocelyn and Mrs. Dorothy, as they paced up the middle and down again, and went through the figure to the admiration of all. She had

entered into the spirit of the game now, and her eyes shone, and her beautiful white teeth flashed out as she talked and laughed ; and Sir Jocelyn inclined his head towards her, going through the measure, as every one could see, like a man in a dream, and those eyes of his, which could look at times so fierce and at other times so languid, were never shifted from her face.

Oh ! but to see her Ladyship footing it with unfortunate John Lunt when it came to her turn ; she too had noted her son's attitude, and honest John, who merely sought to accomplish his task with as much speed as was compatible with his own immense bulk, and the respect due to his partner, was forced to bear the brunt of the displeasure which she was unable to vent on Sir Jocelyn and Dorothy.

It was—"My patience, Goodman Lunt, can you not make shift to move a bit faster ?" or, "Bless the man, I vow he's like an elephant!" or, "Have you not yet learned to know your right hand from your left, John Lunt ?"—so that the sweat fair streamed down the poor fellow's cheeks, and he cut his capers with so woful an air that he seemed like to cry.

I could not but laugh when I glanced at our Patty with her big gallant, Doctor Bradley. However admirable a performer that worthy gentleman might be in the eyes of Mrs. Penny, he was as slow and reflective in his method of dancing as of speaking ; and when I saw our little wench jerking at his great hand, prancing on her little feet, shaking her curls, and making a thousand impatient gestures in the effort to induce him to quicken his pace, I was minded of the old fable about the fly and the coach. Doctor Fanny—for it was Sir Jocelyn's humour thus to abbreviate the worthy man's Christian name—Doctor Fanny's face wore meanwhile a smile of

bland condescension and satisfaction, and I have no manner of doubt that he was much elated by the breathless words of encouragement which Patty let fall every now and then.

"That's it, Doctor! Well stepped, Sir! Pray keep up the pace, your Honour," and so forth.

While I was contentedly awaiting my own turn, listening, it must be owned, with but half an ear to the gentle prattle of good Mrs. Penny, I chanced to raise my eyes to the edge of the pit, and there, among the crowd which pressed round, as before, to look down at the privileged few within, I caught sight of a slender man's figure in black, and of a pale face set off by bright hair. It was my acquaintance of the previous night, the owner of the brown horse. His intent gaze had, I suppose, attracted mine, but no sooner did our eyes meet than he quickly averted his and bent them on Mrs. Dorothy.

There was such a curious look in his face as fairly startled me—a look of anger and sorrow. I had never seen such a look, at once so passionate and so sorely grieved.

Dorothy and Sir Jocelyn took hands; he bent towards her, murmuring in her ear, and she, to vex Lady Gillibrand I fancy, who was standing hard by, looked back at him laughing. I glanced once more at the stranger, and saw fury in his face and yet despair—thus one might look who had received a mortal blow.

"Now it is our turn I think, Master Luke," twittered Mrs. Penny, pointing a long narrow foot. "It is our turn now."

When we wheeled at the end of the measure my eye again swept the throng of faces overhead, but the stranger was gone.

Well, the Triumph being concluded by our party, the

dancing became general. The Marlers, Sword Dancers, and the wenches who had carried the garlands began to foot it round the Maypole; scores of others rushed into the pit and began to jig it there, every lad to his rosy lass; even the more staid folks capered awhile whenever there was a free space near enough to the music. Then the Mummers began their antics, and after that a match was concluded: three couples of lads and lasses of Ferneby village who took sides against the same number of folks from Little Upton, and danced a horn-pipe for a wager; and they kept it up so long and so valiantly that they all but tired out the piper. 'Twas a marvel to see with what zest and spirit they footed it, each side against the other, until, to our great joy, the Little Upton folks owned themselves beat.

Refreshments were set out on long tables in the shelter of the wood, and thither did we all repair, as many as there was room for, while the stewards kept the rest at bay. Lady Gillibrand had been very generous, and the cheer she had provided was of the best, besides which several of the neighbours and tenants had made presents for the occasion of fat chickens and fresh butter, and cream cheese, and such things. My Mother had sent a great syllabub early that morning, and my Uncle Waring a quantity of prunes, which, being well stewed, were very good to eat with the cakes. Some of the neighbouring gentry had furnished loaves of white bread, too, and there was a scramble for these, for many of the country folk had never tasted the like. We ourselves ate for the most part brown bread at The Delf, considering wheaten cakes dainty fare suitable only for rare occasions.

"Good eating deserves good drinking," the saying goes, and there was no stint of excellent liquors. I

noticed some flushed faces about the board as we left it, and I turned to look for Mrs. Dorothy, thinking it well to be at hand lest any of the young sparks, being over-merry, might vex or importune her.

I found her sitting a little apart in the shade of a sycamore tree, with a fine damask napkin spread upon her knee, on which was set forth a plate of junket, while Sir Jocelyn, standing by, held her glass which contained only spring water.

He greeted me jovially as I came up, and clapped me on the shoulder, bidding me go shake my young legs, which he knew were itching for a hornpipe, and saying that he would look after my neighbour.

Though his tone was good-natured I detected in it a significance which warned me that I had best take the hint and retire ere he spoke more plainly.

"You will find me here, Master Luke," said Dorothy. "Pray come and fetch me whenever your Parents are ready to return home."

"Pooh! nonsense!" cried Sir Jocelyn. "No one must dream of going home till to-morrow morning. We shall keep the fun up here till 'tis dark and then adjourn to the great barn, where we shall have a Merry Night. Who talks of going home?"

I went in search of my Father and Mother, whom I found arm-in-arm, watching the sports at the other side of the field; Patty no doubt was dancing, and Johnny had joined his comrades of the school; the Foot-racing was in progress, hats being given as prizes to the lads and gown-pieces and ribbons rewarding the winners of the Maiden-plate. The children were playing at Barley-brake, and Buff, and Bandy Ball, and Trippet, each set being surrounded by a ring of their comrades; and there were a few foolish lads Treacle Dipping for a wager,

plunging their heads into a large dish filled with the sticky stuff, and bringing up the coins thrown therein in their teeth—a nonsensical pastime, reflecting small credit either on the performers themselves or those who abetted them in their folly.

I was turning away to join the dancers, though I felt not much inclination for the exercise, being sore at heart and uneasy at Sir Jocelyn's increasing intimacy with Dorothy, when I suddenly was accosted by Master Bilsborough.

"Can you tell me, Luke," says he, "the name of the gentleman in black who was a witness of the dancing in the pit? I saw him talking to your man as he stood next him in the crowd."

"Did you indeed?" said I. "I did not notice where Stumpy stood."

"But did you not observe the stranger?" queried Master Robert eagerly. "A personable man but quite unknown, as far as I can make out, to any of our acquaintance."

"Perhaps Stumpy can inform you, Sir," said I. "There he stands, see you, but a pace or two away."

I could not forbear accompanying Master Robert to the spot, for, if truth be told, I myself felt no small curiosity to ascertain the nature of the stranger's conversation with Stumpy.

On being questioned, the fellow looked at first puzzled, but was soon induced to recall the appearance of the stranger gentleman who had questioned him.

"Ah, to be sure," said he, "the felly in black. I mind him well. A fine-lookin', well-set-up young spark. Eh, he nobbut asked me the name o' the lady as was dancin' wi' Sir Jocelyn Gillibrand. 'Who's yon?' says he—so I tow'd him; 'Mrs. Dorothy Ullathorne,' I says. 'Oh,' says he, 'and where do she live?' I tow'd him, 'Lychgate

Hall'. 'Far from here?' says he. 'Between three and four mile,' I tow'd him."

"And was that all?" cried Master Robert.

"That's all!" replied Stumpy. "He stood there a bit, looking at her and sayin' to hissel' ower and ower, like a child, 'Dorothy Ullathorne'—'Ullathorne'. 'Lychgate Hall—Lychgate Hall;' an' then one o' the lads from Upton shouts to me fro' t'other side o' the pit, an' I shouts back, an' when I looks round again the strange gentleman was gone."

"I shouldn't wonder," says Master Bilsborough, turning to me with that sneer upon his lip which always made me hate the man, "I shouldn't wonder but this gallant found means to pay his respects ere long to the lady whom we all admire so much. He seems to have taken careful note of her dwelling-place."

Before I could reply Master Bilsborough's attention was engaged by Lady Gillibrand, who just then approached in the company of Parson Formby. The Clergyman was looking about him with a pleasant if somewhat abstracted air, gazing at all this bustle of human life as he might have gazed at a puppet show.

I never knew so gentle a man as Mr. Formby, for all he regularly damned his entire congregation once or twice a year, when it came to the turn of two well-thumbed sermons to be abstracted from the yellowing pile in his study. These treated of Hell Fire, and the good man was accustomed to read them in as placid a voice as that in which he held forth to us on other occasions of Brotherly Love and Practical Piety.

He seemed to spend half his time in a dream, and to look upon this world that we live in as an unreality. But I have always loved the good Parson since hearing my Mother's tale of the day she met him wandering in

the lane and talking to himself—or so it seemed to her until she caught the words he was saying: “Pray, my love, is not the air balmy to-day? How much must we thank a kind Providence who sends us this sunshine and mild breeze to compensate us for the storm of yesterday?”

And after another moment he cried out, in a different voice:—

“See, Lucy, the pretty lambs at play”.

Yet there was never a soul with him. Raising his eyes and perceiving my Mother, who was advancing towards him with some hesitation, he asked her, smiling, if she had overheard his talk; and on her answering that she had he said, still smiling, yet with tears in his eyes:—

“’Tis a custom I have, good dame, of endeavouring to beguile the tedium of my lonely walks by imagining to myself that my dear ones are still with me. As you know I lost my Wife and Child within a week of each other a score of years ago.”

But the remembrance of this simple, kindly old man has set my mind wandering from my narrative.

He stood, I say, with the same gentle smile on his lips, amid the bustle of the crowd, as that with which he would have greeted a solitary village child; but my Lady, I warrant you, was not infected by his mood. Though she loved the Parson well enough to permit him, when he dined at the Hall, to retain his place at pudding-time, instead of retiring as Clergymen in his position are usually accustomed to do, he had not great influence over her.

My Lady had been sorely ruffled by Sir Jocelyn’s attitude towards his newest and youngest tenant, and, as frequently happened, every one with whom she came in

contact fell under the ban of her displeasure in consequence, with the exception of the real culprit.

"What are you doing here, Cousin Bilsborough?" she inquired sharply, "why are you not at the tables yonder, looking after the people and making sure there is no excessive drinking? They have broached another barrel, I hear—foolish indulgence on Jocelyn's part, I consider, but there is no reason why other folks should neglect their duty. Pray, Cousin Bilsborough, take up your post at once, and make sure that no man exceeds his allowance of a quart of strong ale. There is abundance of small-beer that they may drink of to their hearts' content, and according to my directions flagons of currant wine tempered with water and other such refreshing drinks have been likewise placed in readiness, so that none of these noisy folks need go thirsty. Dear, what a hurly-burly to be sure! Would you not think, Mr. Formby, that reasonable people could make merry without all this din?"

The good man looked round him once more with a shake of the head.

"They are like children," he said, "and children can relish no form of enjoyment that is not accompanied by noise."

"Well, I can endure it no longer," returned she. "There is the evening to be thought of, when there is to be what they call a Merry Night, kept up both in and out of doors. I shall request my Son to conduct me home, that I may seek some repose. Where is my Son? Does anybody know? Do you chance to know, Luke Wright?"

"I last saw Sir Jocelyn," returned I, unwillingly, "in the corner of the wood, near the refreshment-tables."

Escorted by Mr. Formby and her Cousin, Lady Gillibrand bent her steps thither, and I followed at a little

distance, in order to be in Mrs. Dorothy's neighbourhood should she find herself in need of service or assistance after the departure of Sir Jocelyn.

Presently I saw the people falling back to make a passage for Lady Gillibrand and her Son, who wore a vexed look, and frequently turned his head over his shoulder to glance back at the spot he had quitted ; but no sooner was he out of sight than I, hastening towards the place where I looked to find Dorothy, was met by her half-way.

"I want to go home, Luke," she cried. "Will you do me the favour to escort me until I am out of the crowd? Your Parents and Patty will doubtless wish to remain a little longer, but I have had enough of it."

"Certainly," cried I, overjoyed that she should, of her own accord, ask something of me, for since our falling out she had taken a kind of pleasure in proving to me how well she could dispense with my attentions, having only consented to ride behind me that morning at my Mother's request. "Certainly, I will attend you with the greatest pleasure, Madam, and accompany you, if you will allow it, to your own door, for I reckon there are many rough folks about ; and in spite of my Lady's orders there has been a good deal of strong liquor flowing, and I should be loth to have you frightened or insulted."

"Will it not keep you a long time from the revels?" said she, smiling.

"Once you are gone," I faltered, with my foolish heart a-thumping, "I am not like to find much pleasure in them."

She laughed. "You all sing the same note," said she. "Your Sir Jocelyn is no better than the rest of you, but I am not so foolish as to pin my faith to any of you."

I winced at this unkind cut, but durst not protest ; had

I not, after all, betrayed her confidence? After a pause, however, I asked in a wounded tone—"Is there never a man in the world, then, that is worthy of faith?"

"I said not that," answered she, "but they be rare. Yet," she added in a lower tone, "I know one."

CHAPTER X.

MIDNIGHT VISITORS.

THE sun was setting when we approached the lychgate, and the shadow of the old Hall reached down to us across the lawn and the flagged path.

We both started when Malachi's bent figure suddenly darted out from the gateway, his face wild, his manner full of excitement.

"He's here!" he cried hoarsely. "Turn about and go away if ye don't want to see 'un."

Dorothy stood stock still, but answered not a word.

"I knowed he'd track ye sooner or later," went on Malachi. "He's kept his word. I told him you was out; he said he knew you was and would come in and wait for 'ee. If I was you I'd make off to The Delf."

"He'd find me there," said she.

She spoke almost in a whisper, and her whole form wavered like a reed in the wind. Looking in her face I seemed to distinguish the counterpart of the look which I had noted in that of the gentleman in black when she had smiled upon Sir Jocelyn—an expression of anger and despair—yet in her case it was mingled with, almost mastered by, a kind of terror. I was convinced that the mysterious "He" in question was no other than this stranger; his remarks to me, his excitement on hearing the name of Dorothy, his questioning of Stumpy, taken

in conjunction with the words let fall by Malachi, pointed conclusively to his identity.

After a moment Dorothy began to move towards the house with an uncertain step ; Malachi laid hold of her dress.

"You are never going in," he cried.

"Indeed I am going in," said she. "I must see him. I must get it over, Malachi."

It seemed to me that in her voice was a note of unwilling joy. It stabbed me, and I was starting to lay hold of her in my turn when, of a sudden, breaking into a run she flitted up the path with an eagerness the sight of which paralysed me. I saw the great door swing on its hinges and a figure appear in the opening, and then, with a cry, she stumbled forward, and a man caught her and drew her within. In another moment the door was closed again and all was still.

Malachi hobbled up the path before I had time to recover myself, and presently vanished round the angle of the house. I stood rooted under the lychgate, my heart throbbing to suffocation, the forbidding old house opposite to me reeling before my eyes. What was this mystery? Who was this pursuer whose arrival had filled Dorothy with such terror, yet whom she hastened so impetuously to meet? Had he come to press an unwelcome suit? Was the fear which she evidently felt caused by him or by the knowledge of her own weakness? Even my brief acquaintance with him had made clear to me that the man was dangerously attractive ; his power over her was evident. Yet perhaps, after all, my jealous heart was unduly suspicious ; this might be but some wrathful Kinsman come in search of her ; her sudden and mysterious appearance might very well be accounted for by the fact that she had run away from her Family in

some freak or fit of temper. But then must she be coerced to return? I swore to myself that I would not permit it. I would remain at hand so as to take her part if need be. In fact I believe no earthly power could have induced me to budge until the stranger reappeared; without pausing to ask myself whether my conduct were honourable or the reverse, I was firmly resolved to watch and wait the issue of events.

After I had remained motionless at my post for some little time, cogitating over every conceivable aspect of the affair, I suddenly bethought me that this could be no Brother of hers, seeing that their complexion was so different; and immediately the remembrance of certain words of hers flashed across me: "I have no liking for black men".

The stranger was fair enough. And again that very night in answer to my question as to whether there was no man whom she held worthy of trust, she had answered that there was indeed one. This was no doubt he! Pray Heaven she did not trust him too far! And once again a fit of jealous fury seized me.

I can never describe all that I felt and suffered during the ensuing hours; how my heart was in turn shaken by doubt and fear, consumed with anger, overwhelmed with pity, fired with a fierce resolve to avenge her wrongs if need be, to succour her should she call for aid.

It had grown quite dark when, chancing to turn in the opposite direction, I observed a light bobbing along at the further end of the lane, and presently heard rapid footsteps approaching.

I withdrew yet more behind the stonework of the gateway, in hopes that the bearer of the light might pass without perceiving me. This lane was unfrequented as

a rule, yet to-night some chance reveller might traverse it in a short cut homewards from the Hall.

The man drawing near, however, turned abruptly in at the gate, setting the wicket swinging in his haste, and as he was for passing me the light shone upon his clothes, and I recognised Sir Jocelyn's fine camlet coat, and his lace and ruffles.

Scarcely knowing what I did, I sprang out of my retreat and laid hold of him.

"You must not go up to the house, Sir Jocelyn!" cried I. "Mrs. Ullathorne would be much displeased."

He wrenched himself from me with an angry oath, lifting at the same time his lantern so that the light fell upon my face.

"Luke Wright!" he exclaimed, "how dare you address me thus? I'll teach you manners, you young dog!"

"I beg your pardon, Sir Jocelyn," said I, "I forgot myself. I—I scarce knew——"

"Pray, what are you doing here?" he interrupted. "Acting watchman or spy?"

"Indeed I do not know," I faltered. "I came to escort Mrs. Dorothy home—and I——" I broke off. "Pray, Sir Jocelyn, do not go in," I went on, after a moment.

"Not go in!" he echoed, "and have my walk for nothing. So you connived at her escape, did you, you rascal, taking advantage of my back being turned! But it will not avail her much, for I have come to carry her to the Hall immediately, that she may open the revels there as well as in the Marl-pit."

He spoke excitedly, and though he was as sober a gentleman as any of the neighbourhood, indeed far more so than many persons of quality of his acquaintance, I could not forbear thinking that to-night he had been drinking.

"I am sure," protested I humbly, "that Mrs. Ullathorne is tired this evening, and, moreover, she has company."

"Company!" he cried. "What company?"

At this moment we heard the bang of a door, and a dark figure emerged from the house and strode rapidly down the path.

"Confusion!" ejaculated Sir Jocelyn, lifting high his lantern in readiness to distinguish the features of the newcomer.

The latter, who had been advancing with head bent, suddenly perceived the light, halted a second, and then quickened his pace. I saw his hand fly to his sword-hilt after the momentary pause.

Sir Jocelyn swore again as the rays, first falling upon the approaching figure, discovered its rich dress and elegant mien.

"Whom have we here?" he cried. "What does this gallant here at such an hour?"

The other was now close to us, and the light revealed to me that his face was convulsed with some violent emotion, and, moreover, unwontedly flushed.

"Sir," cried Sir Jocelyn, in a voice that trembled with anger, "what brings you to this house at this hour of the night?"

"Let me ask you, Sir Jocelyn Gillibrand," returned the other in tones to the full as fierce, "what brings you here? Let me tell you that you have no right to trespass upon the private premises of a Gentlewoman to whom your assiduities are unwelcome."

"Do you say so?" retorted Sir Jocelyn, with a sardonic laugh. "Then I tell you, Sir, that you lie—yes, you lie! These premises happen to be my own property—the lady is my tenant. I have, moreover, every reason to believe that she is not at all averse to my attentions."

The other bowed low, but on straightening himself whipped his sword from its scabbard.

"I must beg leave to deny that statement," cried he. "I am ready to defend my opinion and throw back in your teeth your impeachment of my word."

Sir Jocelyn set down the lantern, and I heard the whistle of his blade as he jerked it from its sheath; in another moment they would have fallen to, then and there, just within the gate, had I not rushed in between them.

"For Heaven's sake, Gentlemen," I cried, "do not draw upon each other here within a few hundred yards of a Gentlewoman's house. If there be bloodshed Mrs. Ullathorne——"

"True," said the stranger, interrupting me. "This is not the place to settle our difference. Is that you, my friend of yesterday?" he added, turning to me. "You are an honest lad, and may surely be trusted to see fair between us when we have reached some more suitable spot."

"No, by all the gods!" broke out Sir Jocelyn, in a more good-humoured tone, "let us do the business in proper form. 'Twere a pity to miss such a chance. I own I love a bit of sword play delicately carried out, and by your look, Sir, you should wield a pretty blade. 'Twere a thousand pities to spoil the affair."

Here the other was about to interpose when Sir Jocelyn checked him.

"Do not doubt but that I mean to afford you the satisfaction which your honour demands," said he. "I do but wish that the affair should be carried out with due respect for ceremony, and as much regard to the niceties of detail as is possible under the circumstances. You will send a friend to me to arrange particulars of the

meeting, which, with your leave, I propose should take place at daybreak to-morrow morning. I presume there is some Gentleman in the neighbourhood who will be willing to act for you."

"Devil a one, Sir!" responded the other. "I am an entire stranger in the place and have no acquaintance within reach, unless you count this young man with whom I chanced to speak a word or two last night."

Sir Jocelyn burst into a mocking laugh, at which the other, who had restored his sword to its scabbard, partially drew it again.

"My quarrel is with you, Sir," he cried fiercely, "and I have no mind to be put off with trifles. Will you agree to stand up to me, man to man, to-morrow, or must I force you to draw now?"

Sir Jocelyn, instead of retorting angrily as I expected, threw out his hand as though to appease his adversary's wrath.

"Pray be patient, Sir," said he. "I was but startled at the irregularity of your proposal. Honest Luke Wright here is the son of one of my tenants, and knows more about the plough-handle than the sword, I imagine. Nevertheless, if you are satisfied with such an assistant, and since the duel is to be a single one, let Luke be your second by all means. He is an honest fellow and though he may cry 'Whoa' or 'Gee-back' when he should say 'Halt,' I have no doubt he knows the nature of fair play."

I flushed up at Sir Jocelyn's good-naturedly contemptuous tone, and glanced hastily at his adversary in dread lest he should now despise me too much to accept of my act of service; but to my surprise and pleasure he looked back kindly, and stretched out his hand to me with that frank and friendly air which had before won my heart.

"Mr. Wright," said he, just as if I were his equal, "will you do me this favour? I vow had I a dozen acquaintances in these parts I should like you as well as any. 'Twill bring me luck, I think, to have so honourable and straightforward a second."

I grasped his long slender hand in mine warmly, and he smiled as he withdrew it, and once more shot a kindly glance at me as though he would have said: "We understand each other". Then, turning to Sir Jocelyn, he addressed him as haughtily as before.

"I am lying to-night at the village ale-house hard by, and must ask you to waive etiquette for the nonce and send your friend to arrange the matter with myself. Mr. Wright can walk to my lodging with me, so that all points can be settled without loss of time."

"Tush!" said Sir Jocelyn in a vexed tone, "'tis a thousand pities to make such a hotchpotch of the business as we are doing. We might just as well settle it straight off, like any common brawlers, for all the dignity or elegance there will be about it. But I own it is not convenient to me to fight to-night. It would, if I may say so, cast a shadow over my good folks' revels if the Master of them were run through before the opening of the ball. To-morrow then, Sir, we shall settle our difference. I will send my Cousin, Mr. Robert Bilsborough, to wait upon you without delay—by the way, Sir, you will perhaps favour me with your name?"

Here Sir Jocelyn picked up his lantern and once more held it so that the light fell full upon the other's face.

"I regret," responded the latter, "that I am unable to oblige you in this matter. It is not convenient to me to disclose my name. But after all, what signifies such a trifle? If I run you through, my identity will signify little to you; if I should fall at your hands, your tenant"

—he nodded towards the house with a stern look—"your tenant will communicate with my friends."

Now it was remarkable that throughout this encounter Sir Jocelyn, though at first angry, had subsequently come to speak in a light and bantering manner of the projected duel, treating the matter as if it were a jest, and appearing to have lost sight of the original cause of dispute—which attitude I considered to be partly due to an odd liking for such affairs, and partly to his semi-intoxicated condition. The stranger, on the contrary, found it hard work, as I noticed, to steady his voice and to emulate Sir Jocelyn's calm, and looked at the Baronet as he spoke with such deadly animosity that I trembled for the latter's fate on the morrow.

I knew well that it was not Sir Jocelyn's insulting words which he resented, so much as his presence on the scene and his assumption of intimacy with Dorothy Ullathorne. Moreover, the man was seething with some secret passion, quite apart from jealousy—impotent anger, belike, or disappointed love. He was in the mood to do desperate things, and as we walked away together my heart failed me on Sir Jocelyn's account.

"You were lucky in finding room at the ale-house, Sir," I said presently, speaking partly because silence was irksome to me and partly because I was anxious to know why he had shifted his quarters.

But he did not gratify me on this point.

"I made it worth their while to find room for me," said he, and spoke no more till we came to the place.

Here he called for refreshments, being attended by the Landlady, who was alone in the house, and whom he informed in a careless tone that she might now furnish him with the reckoning as it was his purpose to set forth on his travels before dawn on the morrow.

"La, Sir!" cried she, in a disappointed tone, "we was in hopes you was going to stay wi' us a two-three days. I am sure you said you was, and we'n turned out Farmer Leatherbarrow to mak' room for ye and all. 'Twas scarce worth our while to mak' him shift for one night!"

"You shall not be the loser, my good Dame," retorted he. "I thought I should find your Marling Feast more diverting than I do, you see. But 'tis dull work watching strangers make merry."

"Eh, dear, an' so 'tis, I doubt," responded the kind soul, with a compassionate groan. "But such a bonny gentleman as yoursel' 'ull not long want for friends, for sure. Sir Jocelyn hissel'——"

"Sir Jocelyn is already my very good friend," cried he with a harsh laugh. "I am expecting a Kinsman of his to see me immediately. But for all that I find it dull here, and I must be off to-morrow. Will any of your folk be stirring so early, think you?"

"My word, your Honour, I can tell you naught as to that. I doubt they'll none of them be back fro' the dancing. I'll do my best to wakken up mysel', but I've been a-foot all day—as a poor woman must when her Gaffer goes a-pleasurin', leavin' all the work to her ——"

"Nay, I'd never be so hard-hearted as to disturb you, Dame. Leave the stable unlocked and a measure of corn handy, so that I may feed my horse before I set out. I'll breakfast somewhere on the road."

Presently Master Robert appeared, and, on the door of the little sanded room being closed, bowed low to my principal, and ironically to me.

It was arranged that the meeting was to take place at Oaklands, a small wood on Sir Jocelyn's property about midway between the inn and Ferneby Hall. Master

Robert eyed the stranger with great curiosity and presently remarked with a titter :—

“This is, I vow, the most mysterious affair. You, Sir, it seems, are determined to remain nameless, and my Kinsman, Sir Jocelyn, not only swears me to the direst secrecy concerning it, but absolutely refuses to make me acquainted with the cause of the dispute.”

“Sir Jocelyn shows his discretion,” replied the other.

“I think, however,” resumed Master Bilsborough with a sly look, “I think, however, he ! he ! that I can form a pretty shrewd guess. A certain fair lady with whom you appear to have been smitten at first sight—he ! he !—and whose address you carefully noted—I suspect——”

“Pray, Sir, have the goodness to keep your suspicions to yourself !” said the stranger hotly. “I think we have now completed our arrangements, and I will no longer detain you. ’Twould be a thousand pities that you should miss any more of the festivities.”

Master Robert looked for the moment a little resentful, but a certain flash in the keen blue eyes which were bent upon him seemed to recommend prudence, and he therefore bowed with a cringing air, and said he was vastly obliged to the Gentleman for his consideration.

CHAPTER XI.

BLADE CROSSES BLADE.

AFTER Master Robert Bilborough had departed, the stranger turned to me with a smile.

"Now, my lad, had you not better go home to your bed? Unless you prefer to jig it with the others yonder until it is time to set forth."

"Nay, Sir," I answered, "if you will allow me to stay here I should like it best. I might not be able to get away again. Besides I have no heart for merry-making, and I doubt I could not sleep."

"And why," said he, looking at me kindly, "why have you no heart for merry-making, my boy?"

I stood still, gazing at him earnestly, but finding no words.

"Well," cried he, half-impatiently, "what is the matter? What troubles you?"

My heart was over-full, and it was a moment or two before I could steady my voice sufficiently to reply without betraying unmanly weakness:—

"Oh, Sir," I cried brokenly at last, "oh, Sir! I would I knew whether you meant well by Dorothy Ullathorne!"

"Do I mean well by her?" exclaimed he. "God help me! I mean so well by her that I would die for her."

The passion of his tone infected me.

"Aye, and so would we all!" cried I, and the tears burst from my eyes.

He had been pacing about the room, and now turned to look at me with such evident pity and amazement that I hung my head for shame.

"You?" he ejaculated. "You! Poor boy!"

I minded Mrs. Ullathorne turning upon me once with almost the same words, when I had sought to make amends for having as I thought wounded her.

"You!" she had cried then with scorn. "*You!* Poor foolish lad!"

This gentleman had spoken without contempt, yet I found the surprise and compassion of his tone even more mortifying. In a moment there seemed to be a gulf between me and Mrs. Dorothy, and I was filled with astonishment at my temerity. Only that morning I had thought to have as good a claim upon her as any other man—that very night I had permitted myself to harbour jealousy of this friend of hers; but all in a flash I felt myself as far removed from them both as from the Queen on her throne.

"Forgive me, Sir," I stammered, flushing so that I thought my cheeks would never get cool again. "I—sure 'twas no harm to love her. Who could help it indeed? And when she came amongst us, and went about her work like one of ourselves——"

"S'death!" cried he, striking the table with his clenched hand. "Could you not see what she was, lad? A plague upon this freak that subjects her to such mistakes!"

His anger breaking forth so suddenly after his former kindness cut me to the quick.

"Indeed, Sir," I faltered, "you need say no more. I see what a fool I've been and have now no hope."

With that his wrath vanished again as quickly as it had come, and he clapped me on the shoulder and looked

at me with kind, merry eyes, and when he spoke it was neither to rebuke nor yet to banter me.

"Nay, Luke," said he, "she is not for thee, nor for such as thee. But thou mayest continue to love her all the same, as a good friend and servant. Aye, there may be a time when she may need thy service. I am forced to leave her and I am glad to think that she has so honest and trusty a friend at hand on whom she may rely."

And thereupon he shook me by the hand, and a great lump rose in my throat. I suppose I was still a lad at heart, for all my twenty years, and though we North-country folk are hard-headed and rough-spoken, we are mighty soft at the core.

Now the strange thing was that, though this Gentleman had humbled me more than any man I had ever met, and though he had shattered my hopes, and, as I told myself, broken my heart, there was something about him so winning that I would joyfully have followed him to the end of the world. When he looked at me with those genial, yet, withal, masterful eyes I could have fallen at his feet. There is no deed, I verily believe, however dangerous or difficult, I would not have sought to accomplish at the bidding of that gently imperious voice.

"I will be your friend and servant too, Sir," said I. "I will be your faithful servant in all things if you will consent to be my Master."

He seemed to feel his power over me for he smiled as though my admiration pleased him.

"Though I have been cruel, Luke," said he, "I see you do not hate me. Well, I am glad of it—I would not willingly lose so honest a friend. I am going to prove my trust in you. While you take a nap, my good boy, so as to be fresh for to-morrow's work, I will write a letter which you must give to Mrs. Ullathorne if I am killed,"

"Nay, do not say such a thing, Sir," cried I. But he went on, still smiling.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I should prefer that Sir Jocelyn should fall, and it is my purpose at least to disable him that he may be kept out of harm's way for some time. However, whether I fall or whether I ride away, do me the favour to give this letter to Mrs. Ullathorne; and if I be dead you may also, if you please, remove this ring from my finger and carry it to her. But make quite sure first that I am indeed a corpse, for I have sworn to wear it till I die. Now to bed, Luke, while I accomplish my business."

He signed towards a kind of cupboard-bed in the corner of the room—such a bed as is common in country places, built partly into the wall and furnished with check curtains.

I hesitated, however, not liking to take possession of the only sleeping accommodation in the place.

"Come, lie down," said he, reading my thoughts, "I shall not sleep to-night."

Removing my coat and boots I threw myself upon the bed, but instead of sleeping, furtively watched my Master—for thus I called him in my own mind—as he sat at the table.

He had produced writing materials from his valise and was busy scribbling. As the rays of the two mould candles fell upon his fine pale face I noted that its expression changed many times. Now it was pensive, now severe; anon tender, and once I saw him smile. He tore up several sheets, but at length applied himself steadily to his task, and while watching him I was surprised by sleep.

When I awoke some hours later my Master was shaving very deliberately by the light of the candles, which had

now burnt low ; having finished this proceeding he next combed out his hair, and I marvelled at its gloss and its profusion. It was so fine that when he again bound it with its ribbon its compass was much smaller than any-one could have believed possible who had seen it shaken loose. Having resumed his coat, and adjusted his ruffles to a nicety, he approached my bed.

"What! thou art awake," he cried. "That is well. Get up quickly, lad, for we must be stepping."

"Shall I saddle the horse, Sir?" asked I.

"Yes, if you please. I have already fed him. You may carry down the valise if you will, and I will follow you in a moment."

I saw that two or three letters lay upon the table ; these he now proceeded to enclose in a single wrapper ; as I left the room he was sealing this with the ring which he took from his finger.

He joined me in the stable before I had concluded my work, and himself helped me to accomplish it. As we were about to leave the place he handed to me the packet of letters, which he drew from his breast pocket.

"Give this to her," he said, "after my departure—whether for the next world or for some other portion of this one."

"I am to give it to Mrs. Ullathorne in any case?" I queried.

"Yes, in any case."

I placed the packet in my bosom and we set forth.

The day had but just begun to break, and the road gleamed dimly between the dark hedges. I had never felt so guilty since that terrible morning when I had fled from Lychgate Churchyard ; it seemed to be my fate to help those I best loved to accomplish deeds of which I disapproved. My heart thumped so loudly now as almost

to drown for me the beat of the horse's hoofs on the road, and my legs shook under me. I cast about me many scared looks, expecting the folks to rush out upon us, and I was glad when we had left the little cluster of houses behind us and forsook the road itself for a bridle-path across the fields.

My Master was very composed, but silent, and I trudged by his side with my eyes for the most part cast upon the ground, until I perceived all at once that the grass over which we passed, that at first had seemed grey, began to show a faint and delicate green, and then, looking about me, I noticed that the leaves and twigs of the hedge were edged with silver, and then that the sky above me was already a milky blue. Then great arrows of light shot up from behind the distant woods, and immediately the sky became all dappled with pink and golden clouds, and the trees seemed to be on fire, and glancing in my companion's face I saw it ruddy and his hair glowing.

"Perchance the last sunrise I shall ever see," said he. And then, half to himself, "My Dorothy, wilt thou weep before sunset comes?"

As we drew near the wood I saw three dark figures emerge from its shadow into the sunny plain; and soon noted the twinkling of Sir Jocelyn's gold-laced coat.

"We are late," cried my Companion, and pressed on, so that I had to run at my topmost speed to keep pace with the horse.

My Master dismounted, and while I tied up his horse to a sapling, saluted the Gentlemen with distant courtesy; and I noticed what a contrast there was between him and Sir Jocelyn. The latter had not slept, it was evident, nor made any attempt to compose his attire; his strong dark beard showed plain on his flushed face, his ruffles were crushed and torn, and his wig disordered,

"Let me introduce," said Sir Jocelyn thickly, "my friend, Doctor Francis Bradley, who hopes to find a patient in one of us. Now, Fanny, never look so glum—though thou wouldst fain do a little of the carving, like a good surgeon that thou art, be not envious, man—who knows. There may yet be some blood-letting left for thee to do."

To my sorrow I saw that the hours which had intervened since we parted had not served to sober Sir Jocelyn ; though not absolutely intoxicated he was by no means himself, and would therefore, I fancied, be less than a match for his adversary. I loved them both, but my new Master best, and 'twas more on his account than Sir Jocelyn's that I grieved they should not be equally pitted, for I was ever a lover of fair play, and it hurt me that one should have the advantage over the other. Yet no sooner did the combat begin than I realised that I need have had no such qualms ; Sir Jocelyn knew what he was about and wielded his blade, as I could not but see, in a masterly fashion.

I had seen men fight before with cudgels and with fists, and once I had gone with my Father to Bolton Wake, where a pair of rough fellows had an "Up and Down" battle, purring or kicking each other with their great clogs, and throttling too, so that I made sure murder would be done ; but never had I seen anything in the least like this duel.

Had I not known that my Master was in deadly earnest, had I not taken note of his fierce eye and compressed lip, I might have thought the two Gentlemen stood up to each other in play. The whole scene was unreal ; the early hour, when the world seemed for the most part asleep ; the glade peaceful ; the birds twittering lazily in the trees above us ; the air, pure and sharp with a smell

of dewy growing things in it, and here on the mossy sward these two handsome, courtly Gentlemen crossing their blades with so pretty and seemingly careless a grace.

Each had stripped off coat and waistcoat, and under the thin cambric of his shirt the moulding of the form was plain to be seen. Sir Jocelyn, who was the senior by ten or twelve years, was far more powerfully made than his adversary, though the latter, for all his slenderness, had muscles strong as steel, and a lightning-like quickness of motion. As I watched his compact, alert figure, his eager face, his burning eye, I bethought me of a greyhound straining at his leash.

Had it not been for my fears I should have enjoyed the spectacle, for I vow it was a pretty sight, and to me, who was ever of a sporting turn, the novelty of it might have been delightful. The poise of their forms, the varying attitudes—like play-acting it seemed to me—the quick leaping on this side and on that, the swift lunge, the skilful parry. Now I thought Sir Jocelyn must run his adversary through, but the other was ready for him and the blades slid innocently against each other.

All at once my Master made a sudden dart forward and I saw the blood gush over Sir Jocelyn's shirt.

"He's hit," I shouted, "Sir Jocelyn's hit! For God's sake stop, Gentlemen!"

But they went on as if without heeding me, my Master pressing Sir Jocelyn very close.

"Master Bilborough," I cried wildly, "make them give over before 'tis too late. See how Sir Jocelyn is bleeding!"

But he made me no answer, and glancing at him I saw a horrible look in his face, half-triumph, half-greedy curiosity, as if he would have taken pleasure in his patron's downfall.

"Doctor Bradley, Sir," I gasped, "surely 'tis time to interfere?"

But the doctor, whether because of his natural phlegm, or because he deemed it contrary to professional etiquette to spoil the making of so promising a patient, stood by calmly enough, tapping the lid of his snuff-box.

The sight of the blood had brought home to me the nature of the sport I had been watching; and I was so maddened by Master Robert's want of feeling and the Doctor's coolness that I could stand by in patience no longer.

At imminent risk to myself, and possibly also to them, I now rushed between the combatants, knocking up their blades with my Master's riding-cane, which I had been holding.

"For Heaven's sake stop, Gentlemen!" I pleaded, almost with a sob; "do not let us have murder here!"

"Out of my way, sirrah!" exclaimed my Master, his eyes flickering with wrath, the pupils contracted to points no bigger than a pin's head; if looks could stab I had fallen at his feet, and indeed as he spoke he gave a threatening turn of the hand which held his uplifted blade as though he would have pierced me with more than looks.

"Zounds!" cried Sir Jocelyn; "this comes of your choice of a second, Sir—did I not tell you that—that——"

He broke off, dropping his sword-arm, down which the blood was trickling, and staggering.

Doctor Bradley stepped forward and caught him in his arms.

"If I may be permitted to offer an opinion," he remarked solemnly, "I should say that Sir Jocelyn Gillibrand is wounded."

"Hang me, Sir, it scarce requires a wiseacre to discover

that," retorted my Master. "The question is, is he wounded too seriously to admit of his continuing to fight me?"

"Oh, I'll fight you quick enough—I'll go on in a minute," said Sir Jocelyn, "but d——n me, Sir! I can't see why you are not satisfied. You've pinked me already, and——"

"Sir," I whispered in my Master's ear, "oh, Sir, do not take a mean advantage. How could Sir Jocelyn stand up with you now on equal terms? Sure 'twould not be honest or fair."

He gazed at me a moment fixedly, and then, his passion leaving him with the suddenness which I had before noted, sheathed his blade and advancing to Sir Jocelyn, who was standing propped against a tree, declared in a formal tone that he was now satisfied.

Sir Jocelyn half extended his hand, but the other bowed stiffly, and was turning away when the Baronet called him back.

"Gad, Sir! you seem to hate me more than ever there be cause for—I vow I have no hatred of you. On the contrary, I could love you for being such a pretty swordsman. 'Twas a fair quarrel, fairly fought—I bear you no grudge, though the wound you have given me if not dangerous, is mighty inconvenient. Yet you will not shake hands—Doctor Fanny, I am not like to bleed to death during the next five minutes, am I?"

With great seriousness the doctor, after opening the patient's shirt and examining the wound, pronounced that such a contingency was unlikely.

"Pshaw! a mere flesh wound," said Sir Jocelyn. "Kindly get out of earshot for that space of time then, my good friend. Cousin Robert, do me the favour to walk as far as yonder tree and remain there till I sum-

mon you. Luke, get this gentleman's horse unfastened ready for him to mount after we have had speech together."

As I went to do his bidding I could not forbear catching the words with which he opened his discourse:—

"Pray, Sir, why were you so eager to take my life? I vow I never crossed swords with one so bloodthirsty."

I unfastened Star, tightened his girth and saw to the rest of his gear, and then hearing a whistle I ventured to look round. My Master was helping Sir Jocelyn to seat himself on the ground, and after this had been accomplished he stretched forth his hand. Sir Jocelyn grasped it with alacrity; and then the other straightened himself and walked towards me.

"Shall I ever see you again, Sir?" I asked, as I held his stirrup.

"Oh, I will come back," he returned drearily, "but who knows what success I may hope for? Deliver the letter, good Luke, and be Mrs. Dorothy's friend and faithful servant. I thank you for your good offices to-day, and most for the honest words which saved my honour. I had not been so savage had I known Sir Jocelyn better; but who would not be aflame if he thought danger and discredit threatened what he most loved? Farewell, good Luke—be my friend still, while I'm away."

He gave me his hand and I wrung it without speaking, following his retreating form with eyes all blurred with grief. I cannot tell how I came to love the man so well in such a short space, but I vow I was more sorrowful for his departure than for the ruin of my castle in the air.

CHAPTER XII.

SIR JOCELYN AND MYSELF ARE TAKEN TO TASK.

I RETURNED to Sir Jocelyn, who had now summoned his other attendants, and languidly extended on the ground, was permitting the ministrations of the Doctor.

"Can I be of any service?" I asked, looking down at him.

"You may help me to get home presently," returned Sir Jocelyn. "'Tis lucky the distance is short; I may walk it without attracting attention. 'Tis but a scratch after all, you say, Doctor?"

"An inch more to the left and you had been a dead man," responded Doctor Fanny very seriously.

"And it had been a thousand pities I had died under any hands but yours, eh, Fanny? Well, now, good people all, bear in mind that this little business is to be kept secret. Mum's the word, remember! On you, Cousin Bilsborough, I know I may count." (Here he shot a warning glance at his Kinsman, as though to say "Blab at your peril.") "You, Doctor, are ever discretion itself. As for Luke here, I fancy his tongue is not much given to wagging, and, moreover, the safety of this new friend of his, for whom he seems to have taken so prodigious a liking, would be endangered were news of the affair to get abroad. Thou'lt not tell mortal man of our morning's work, wilt thou, Luke?"

"No indeed, Sir," said I. I was glad in my heart that he had said naught about mortal woman.

"Done with your plastering, Doctor?" asked Sir Jocelyn. "Well, help me up and let's be stepping. You'll find your own way home, Doctor Fanny, will you not? Come, Robert, lend us an arm here, and Luke, give me your shoulder."

Supported between us he moved forward ; the Doctor, who had taken no notice of the suggestion that his presence was no longer required, following us at a dozen paces. Sir Jocelyn looked serious enough as we went along ; I thought at first it was because of the burning of his wound, but I presently discovered that he was thinking deeply.

"A noble fellow," he said suddenly, as though speaking to himself. "I must admire him though he well-nigh made an end of me—I am glad we shook hands. And yet," he added after a pause, "and yet I hate him !"

I could not help exclaiming at this, and he looked round at me, smiling.

"Do not be so scandalized. If I hate him, 'tis because I admire him so much, and because he baffles me. We shook hands—yes, we shook hands, but we are enemies for all that."

The short cut across the field soon brought us to the Hall. Though it was now five o'clock not many people were astir, but as we crossed the yard we were startled by the sound of an opening casement, and her Ladyship's voice called from behind the curtains.

"Robert ! Is that you, Billsborough ? Where have you been, sirrah. Though we broke up three hours ago you have not been to bed, for I vow my poor Fido has been whining most piteously for want of a companion. Whom have we here ? Jocelyn ! My dear Son, why are you abroad at this hour ?"

She was craning her night-capped head over the sill

now, her eyes wide with astonishment under her flapping frills.

"I have been for a little walk, Madam," returned Sir Jocelyn imperturbably. "I thought a stroll in the air would cool my blood after the revels, and so I desired my good Coz here to lend me his arm."

"And who is lending you an arm on the other side?" queried Lady Gillibrand shrilly. "Why, 'tis young Wright—Luke Wright! Pray, how come you to be lending Sir Jocelyn an arm, Luke Wright?"

"Faith, your Ladyship," cried he, answering for me, "because Sir Jocelyn could not walk very steadily without it."

"Oh fie!" said Lady Gillibrand, in a tone of would-be severity. "Fie! fie! fie! Jocelyn—But surely that is Doctor Bradley coming through the gate! Now what is Doctor Bradley doing in the place at this time of morning?"

Though I had thought Sir Jocelyn somewhat the worse for liquor before the encounter the affair itself had sobered him, and he was now perfectly sensible; but in order to put her Ladyship off the scent he chose to appear partially intoxicated.

"Madam," said he, speaking very thick and with tipsy gravity, "you must know that during the course of our peregrin—peregrin—tions—dash me, Robert, what's the word? Pere—perambulations I chanced to trip—did I trip, Bilborough, or did I sit down?"

"You sat down, I think, Cousin Jocelyn," replied Master Bilborough respectfully.

"That'sh it," said Sir Jocelyn, nodding gravely, "I shat down—shuddenly—and I fell backwardsh—no, forwardsh—and I damaged my rib!"

"Your rib!" screamed Lady Gillibrand.

"Yesh," returned her son solemnly. "Very serious thing—damage a rib. Rib—ve'y precious. Noble thing—rib. First woman made out of rib."

"Lud!" cried Lady Gillibrand, "what a tale! My dear Jocelyn, I am afraid you are seriously hurt. You must go to bed at once. But how could you injure your rib in such a way? Doctor Bradley—Pray come here, Doctor Bradley. I beg you will attend to my Son at once. He tells me he has injured his rib—did you know that he had injured his rib, Doctor Bradley?"

The Doctor came forward saluting, and then rolled an inquiring eye, first at her Ladyship and then at his patient.

"Course, Doctor Fanny knew I'd damaged my rib," said Sir Jocelyn—"I told you about it, didn't I, when we were sthrollin'—thro' the woodsh."

"Was Doctor Bradley strolling the wood too?" inquired Lady Gillibrand severely. "Indeed, Doctor Bradley, I am surprised at such conduct. How came such a staid, sensible man, as I always took you to be, to be perambulating the wood at daybreak? 'Tis to be hoped that your blood wanted no cooling."

"Aye, indeed," cut in Sir Jocelyn, with such a droll assumption of surprised indignation that I couldn't for the life of me help laughing. "How came you to be in the woodsh, Fanny? What the deush brought you pram—pram—pramb'ling woodsh so early? Your blood don't want coolin', I'll shwear. Take one of your own pills man—take a dram of i—pic—pic—pic—pic—icuanha—ha—ha ha!"

Doctor Bradley turned to him perfectly seriously.

"That is not a remedy I should be likely to adopt under the circumstances you describe," he remarked.

"Well, I am glad you were there as it happened," said

her Ladyship. "Dear, dear! I must get dressed at once. Is it not strange, Doctor Bradley, that my Son should have hurt his rib by falling backwards—or was it forwards you said, Jocelyn?"

"Which did I say, Cousin?" inquired Sir Jocelyn of his Kinsman.

"I think it was sideways," said Master Robert.

"I am sure he didn't say sideways!" screamed my Lady. "Besides, what was the good of your lending him an arm if you could not prevent his falling sideways? And was not Luke supporting him also?"

"Not mush shupport," said Sir Jocelyn, shaking his head. "Let'sh have a tankard of ale—ale'sh shupport-in'."

"I should advise you to get to bed as soon as you can, Sir Jocelyn," said Doctor Bradley. "Pray come upstairs and allow me to see to your wo——"

"To my *rib*, you dog!" cried Sir Jocelyn, nudging him. "Shpeak plain, man!—There you go, shta—shtammerin' d'shgracefully. Say rrib—not wo—wo—worib——"

Here I could not for the life of me suppress a titter, which had the effect of drawing down Lady Gillibrand's wrath on me; and while I stood with head bent before the storm, Sir Jocelyn made his escape, supported by Doctor Bradley and Master Robert.

After my Lady had informed me that I was a drunkard, an idiot, an unmannerly cub and a few other things of the kind—for when indignant she was not over-choice of language—she dismissed me with a promise that she would take the first opportunity of giving my Parents her opinion of my conduct.

I made my way homewards in a state of bewilderment and excitement which defies description; the events of the last twelve hours seemed to me a nightmare, and my

heart felt like a lump of lead. Dorothy, lovely Dorothy, was miles above my reach, and my new friend and Master had ridden away into the unknown. To come to more homely matters, I had been out all night and could give no account of myself; I had, moreover, the uneasy notion that the woman at the ale-house would be like to tell of my presence there, and that Lady Gillibrand would certainly give a very bad report of me.

I received cold comfort from the folks at The Delf, for there I met with averted faces and harsh words.

"So," says my Father, "our young gentleman has come home, has he? Sure 'tis very kind of him to give us his company this morning when nobody wants it, after being so careful to keep out o' the road all night."

"Indeed," says my Mother, "'twas very ill done of thee, Luke. I could never ha' thought thou'd ha' been that selfish. There's poor Patty might ha' had a bit of a fling too if ye hadn't been so taken-up wi' your own pleasurin'. I've no patience wi' folks as can't gie a thought to somebody besides theirsels."

Patty said nothing, but tossed her head and bit her lip; and turned a scornful shoulder on me when I came a-nigh her.

"Where were you?" thundered my Father; "what didst do wi' thyself? Answer me that. We couldn't catch sight or light on you i' the crowd, and your Mother made sure you'd stopped at home to smarten yoursel' up a bit on your way back fro' Mrs. Ullathorne's—Stumpy said he saw ye walking wi' Mrs. Ullathorne—you took her home, didn't ye?"

I nodded.

"Well, then, that's how it fell out, I suppose," he went on with diminishing ire; "you cut away straight back to the field and we missed ye. But ye might ha' taken a

bit o' thought for our Patty when ye didn't knock up again' her—you might ha' knowed she'd come home again wi' thy Mother to fettle hersel' up a bit afore steppin' out for the barn."

"I declare," cried my Mother in a vexed tone, "I'd ha' taken the poor little lass mysel', only I made sure every minute you was comin' back for her."

I mumbled something about being sorry I had not thought of it, and bolted upstairs to wash me and change my clothes.

When I came down they were all at breakfast, and seemed to have settled with each other to take no more notice of me; my Mother dumped down my basin of porridge before me without a word; my Father talked in a loud voice to Johnny, enjoining him repeatedly to be a good-natured lad and kind to his Sister. Patty sat very straight and stiff at the further end of the table, and never said a word at all, and my heart smote me when I saw how woebegone she looked.

"Who did ye dance with, Brother Luke?" cried Johnny, all at once. "Tell us who ye danced with?"

Patty shot a sharp glance towards me, and my Mother set down the milk pitcher with a bang.

"Aye, indeed," said she, "we'd all be glad to know that."

"Sure," says Patty, looking up, "it must have been somebody mighty taking."

"But who did ye dance with?" persisted Johnny.

"Hold thy din!" cried I angrily under my breath.

"Come," said my Father, "is it to be Johnny's turn now? Thou art a nice lad to go a-pleasurin'. Leaving the little lass in the lurch over-night and barging at thy Brother in the morn; a fair question deserves a fair answer, I say."

"Eh, I'm fair moidered among you all!" I burst out. "I didn't forget Patty o' purpose—'twas a mistake and I'm sorry for it——"

"There now, that's summat," said my Father, ironically.

"And as for answering Johnny," I went on, "how can I tell you who I danced with? There was a lot o' lasses there from all sides o' the country."

"Well, who was your last partner then?" said Patty, addressing me at last, for her curiosity had got the better of her.

"Oh dear!" cried I, impatiently, "who could remember that? Mrs. Penny, I think."

I spoke the truth, for indeed I had not danced since Mrs. Dugden and I had trod the opening measure together.

"Now that is a story," cried Patty, "for Susan told me that Mrs. Penny had gone to bed with the headache before she left the barn; and *she* was back at midnight."

"Oh, then I don't know who she was!" grumbled I, ladling away at my porridge. "I couldn't mind the names of all as was there. She had two eyes and a nose and a mouth like the other wenches, and a bunch of ribbons at her waist—and she trod upon my toe," I added with a kind of desperation, and wishing in my heart I had wit enough to put my family off as cleverly as Sir Jocelyn had done.

Then, pushing away my plate, I rose from the table and went out to saddle Chestnut.

When I returned in the evening my reception was still more unpleasant, for, as I feared, some busybody had carried the tale of my being at the ale-house in company of the strange gentleman, and though, luckily, no one knew that I had passed the night there, my Parents were ill-pleased. And then Lady Gillibrand had been good enough to relate my arrival at the Hall that morning in

what she was pleased to term an intoxicated condition ; and, moreover, many of the neighbours had declared that they had missed me at the barn. So that altogether I found a hornets' nest ready to receive me, and was brow-beat and bullied by one and the other till I was fairly at my wits' end.

"I suppose her Ladyship was right," cried my Mother, at last ; "the secret of the whole business is that you were in liquor ; that's why you can give no account of what you did with yourself."

"Very like," said I, "very like, indeed. As how it is I can tell you naught about it."

Patty followed me out into the garden.

"I don't believe a word of it," she said. "You were as sober as a judge when you came home. There's been summat agate as ye don't want to talk on."

"Patty !" I cried peevishly, "for the Lord's sake give over troubling me ! Haven't I had enough already ? If ye was to question me till Doomsday you wouldn't be the gainer."

We generally did a bit of work together at this hour, she weeding or tying up the flowers and I busying myself with fork or spade. But that evening, leaving her abruptly, I set off as fast as might be for Lychgate to deliver my message to Mrs. Dorothy.

CHAPTER XIII.

A PARABLE AND A STORY.

I FOUND Mrs. Dorothy sitting alone in her gloomy parlour reading a bundle of old letters which, on my entrance, she hastily thrust into a box that stood handy on the table. Her eyes were red and swollen, and her face pale.

"Forgive my coming so late, Madam," said I. "I have a message to deliver to you."

She started up, her lips parting, her eyes wild.

"A message—from whom?" she gasped.

"From one whose name I know not, but who rode away this morning alive and well, after entrusting me with this," I answered, and I handed her the letter.

She broke open the seals which, as I had already noted, bore a curious design as of a bunch of feathers or some such thing coming out of a little crown; and, after reading the first few lines, uttered a cry.

"He was unhurt, Madam, quite unhurt!" I exclaimed eagerly. "I saw him depart myself, and there was not a scratch on him."

She then read the letter carefully through, her lips compressed as though to prevent their trembling, her eyes devouring the page. Then with a sigh she folded it and placed it in the box before mentioned. Next taking up the enclosures one by one, she burnt them in the candle, I watching her meanwhile in much amazement.

"I suppose you are doing right?" I said at last.

"Oh yes," she returned, looking up with a faint smile; "it is by his desire. These were only to be despatched in case—in case things turned out differently."

She sat down again, resting her elbows on the table, and her chin in her hands; and looked at me fixedly for a moment or two. Then she said:—

"You were with him, I know; he tells me so—he speaks very well of you, Luke."

"Indeed, I am glad of it," I cried, my heart swelling at the thought that he had praised me. "Oh, Madam, he is a king among men."

Her whole face lit up with the most beautiful expression of rapture, and I saw in a moment how it was with her, and marvelled more and more at the strange coil. Here were two who loved each other, who seemingly were made for each other; what fate was it then which kept them apart?

"But tell me, Luke—tell me!" she went on impatiently; and then I related the whole affair from the beginning to the end, watching her narrowly the while. Mistress of herself though she was, her face told its own tale of alarm and anger and love and pride, and at last settled into an expression of such sorrow that my heart was wrung for her.

"Why should this be," I cried, "since you love him and since he loves you, why should you drive him away from you? Why must he be condemned to misery? Sure there is no reason why you should not make him happy and yourself too."

She rose and began to pace about the room as she frequently did when disturbed; and presently she halted by the table.

"Luke," said she, "supposing a man stricken with

the fever craved a cup of poison, would you give it to him ? ”

“ No, to be sure,” said I, “ but——”

“ You would withhold it, would you not ? ” she went on vehemently, “ even if in his burning pain he besought you for it without ceasing—even if in his ravings he thought it the one thing needful for his cure. Would it not be true love and kindness to withstand him and trust to the moment when, the fever passing, he, a sane man again, would thank you ? ”

As I stared at her she dropped into a chair and hid her face in her hands and broke into passionate weeping.

“ Oh, my God ! ” she cried. “ My God ! ”

She wept for a long time, and I stood helplessly by, miserable at the sight of her grief, but unable to think of any words which might soothe it. I could not for the life of me understand why she should make so strange a comparison, and after some pondering I was constrained to speak.

“ I cannot follow you at all, Madam,” said I, “ but surely what is one man’s poison might be another man’s meat, and I am certain my Master cannot live without you.”

She raised her head at this and smiled faintly, though her breast heaved, and the tears still hung on her long lashes. “ My Master ! ” said she presently, “ is that what you call him ? ”

“ I gave him that name in my own mind,” I answered, “ when I told him I would ever be his friend and faithful servant.”

“ And when will you see him again ? ” asked she mournfully.

“ He is coming back——” I was beginning, when the expression of her face daunted me.

"Oh no!" she cried; "no, no! Oh, what folly! What cruel folly! What persecution! He must not come back!"

"Do you fear him so much, Madam?" said I.

She made no answer, and with a sigh I approached to take my leave.

"I want to tell you, Madam," I said, "that I—I—I have come to my senses and will never again trouble you with foolish speeches and professions of—of—of——"

For all her sore heart she burst out a-laughing.

"What!" cried she, "have I lost my young lover?"

"Madam," I returned, "you know best what folly 'twas in me to have ever dared to consider myself such. I love you still, but as your follower and true servant. I told my Master I would ever be your servant and his too. Since I have known him I see how wrong and foolish I was to think you might ever stoop——"

"Ah, my good Luke," said she with a sigh, "all this is idle talk. I think if you knew all my story you would fancy you did me honour in offering me your honest love. But I will tell you the truth as between woman and man—I have no love for any but one—and to him I can never belong. And now, my good friend, I am thankful to accept your service—you may even continue to love me in another way, and for your own guidance I will tell you a little tale. 'Twill be the second you have heard to-night:—There was a man once—nay, a lad just like you—and he set his heart upon a certain blossom which grew high—high—high upon a thorny tree. He would fain have worn it in his bosom, and cheated his fancy with the thought that he would one day climb and win it. But he presently found that it grew too high and, moreover, that he was torn and wounded when he

strove to reach it. He therefore gave up the attempt.—How like you that little story?”

“I think it suits my case very well,” said I gloomily.

“Nay, but there is more to it,” returned she.—“All the time that this foolish lad had been pining for the flower that grew out of his reach there had been another flower blooming at his very threshold, and filling all his house with sweetness, and he had never taken heed of it. He passed it a hundred times a day, and neither noticed its beauty nor its sweet scent. And yet he might have worn it, and it would have brought him such joy and peace and blessedness as the other never could.”

“I don’t understand that part of the story at all,” I cried almost roughly; and with that I took up my hat.

“Well then,” said she, “think on it, Luke, for my tale is not done yet.—One day another man came by and saw the flower and carried it away, and the house was desolate and its owner lonely for ever after, and the reason of it all was that he had no eyes in his head.—And now good-night!”

I went out feeling thoroughly vexed and bewildered; was it possible that she could mean Patty?

I had borne well enough to be put in my place by my Master, and had found myself able to submit to the decree which bade me exchange my post as suitor for that of servant; but when it further came to the disposal of my will and affections, I rebelled. I could choose a wife for myself without the assistance of Mrs. Dorothy, and I certainly should never do anything so absurd as to fix on Patty. Yet, for all that, as I tramped homewards under the budding hedge Mrs. Dorothy’s last words recurred to me over and over again in a teasing fashion. “And

then the house was desolate and its owner lonely for ever after, and the reason of it all was that he had no eyes in his head."

As we sat at supper that night I could not forbear looking at Patty, from outside as it were—I mean as a stranger might look—and wondering how her face and ways would strike such an one.

I was forced to admit that they were not ill; there was a kittenish grace about the lass which some folks might find taking, and if a man were in love with her he might even think her saucy temper bewitching in its way.

Not much was said during supper, however, for every one was still at outs with me; and the meal came to an end so early that I found there would be time for a little gardening before we went to bed.

"I'll set out those roots for you, Patty," said I carelessly, "if you'll tell me where you want 'em put."

"I'm sure I've told you forty times," she returned, pettishly; "and 'tis too late to-night, anyhow."

"Well, I'm going to plant 'em," I cried, "'twill be your own fault if they are not to your liking."

"Go out with him, my dear," said my Mother, who was, I think, pleased that I had laid aside my sullenness. Gentle soul! she never could bear to be long out o' friendship with any one.

Patty obeyed, holding her chin very high, however, and giving her orders as briefly as might be. She stood by in silence while I worked; and after a bit I sat back on my heels and looked up at her. It was almost too dark to see her face, but I noticed the fluttering of the frills at her bosom, and the rigid lines of her little figure.

"You are vexed with me still, Patty," said I.

"Vexed!" cried she, "why should I be vexed?"

"I'm truly sorry you missed the dancing last night," I went on earnestly.

"The dancing—pooh! I don't care so much about the dancing," returned she, "but I do think 'tis nasty of you, Luke, to have secrets from me. I'm sure I tell you everything—every word your Dorothy says, and how she looks and what she does—and I don't mind so much when 'tis Dorothy you're after—but when you go taking up wi' other lasses and won't so much as tell me their names——"

"I give you my word, Patty," I said, "there is no other lass."

"Then what were you doing so late at the Hall, and why won't you answer a civil question, and who was it you were at the Merry Ploughboys with? And—and—eh, Luke, ye're not a bit like yoursel'!"

"I can't help that," I returned, with an important air; for I was gratified at her being so taken-to. "I shouldn't mind telling my own secrets, but other people's secrets you know, Patty, must be sacred."

"You own it, then!" cried she with a little scream. "You own you've got a secret! Then I'll never, never tell you any of mine, and I'll never love you again, Luke!"

"You never loved me much, I think," retorted I; "'twas only yesterday that you told me you did not want to dance with me if you could get anybody better."

"That was because——" began Patty, and then she tossed her head. "'Tis true enough, I don't love you much," said she. "Why should I, indeed?"

Here, to my surprise, and no doubt to hers also, a sob broke from her which she tried without much success to turn into a laugh.

I jumped up and caught her by the hand.

"Come," said I, "you do love me a little bit, and I love

you too, for that matter, my little playmate. Let us kiss and be friends."

And with that I snatched a kiss, she being unprepared, else I doubt she had not allowed it.

But my heart smote me, for there were tears upon her face.

"Patty," said I, "why should you cry? Have we not always been the best of friends and companions. Sure, we have quarrelled and made it up a dozen times a day these ten years——"

"But that's all over," sobbed Patty, "you—you are not my playmate any more. You never give me a thought now—and you—you—you keep secrets from me."

She put her apron to her eyes, but suddenly jerked it down again.

"For that matter I have secrets too—secrets of my own that I shan't tell you—and secrets about Dorothy."

"About Dorothy!" I echoed loftily. "I wouldn't give much for 'em then, for I dare swear she has no secrets from me now."

Thereupon the little wench, though her bosom was still heaving, began to laugh very impudently.

"You know so much about her past, don't you, Luke? Pray, do you know where she was brought up, and about her Parents? She told *me* of them herself."

Now indeed I knew none of these things, and I was amazed and chagrined that Mrs. Dorothy should have made a confidant of Patty. I could not help speaking in a vexed tone, though I strove to reply carelessly that I never thought to inquire into such matters, and it 'twas very ill-done in Patty to have betrayed so much idle curiosity.

"For I cannot conceive," I added severely, "that Mrs. Ullathorne should have discoursed on them of her own free will."

"Perhaps she did and perhaps she didn't," said Patty saucily ; "some things she told me and some things I found out for myself."

"You prying chit !" said I.

Patty laughed and shook her head at me ; and then suddenly changing her tactics clasped both her little hands about my arm and thrust her face close to mine. Even in the dusk I could see her eyes twinkling.

"Tell me your secret, Luke," said she, "and I'll tell you mine."

"Tell me yours first," said I, placing one finger under her provoking chin, "and if 'tis worth my while to listen I'll think about telling you mine."

"Well, first of all," said she, confidentially, "first of all Dorothy Ullathorne is in love—and not with you, my poor Luke."

"That is news indeed !" I returned calmly.

"What ! Did you know it ? She carries a token round her neck which she often kisses ; and she wears besides a little amulet hidden under her frills. I saw it lying on her table early one morning and peeped at it ; there was a curl of hair behind it, beautiful hair, a kind of golden——"

"Beautiful hair, indeed," I interrupted, for her important air irritated me, and I did not choose to be outdone.

"What ! have you seen it ?" cried she in surprise.

"I have seen the whole head," I returned, folding my arms and resting them negligently on the spade-handle. "I have seen the man, Patty."

"My stars !" she cried, staring. "But how cool you take it, Luke. I thought you was in love with her."

"So I was," I returned tragically, "but all that's done with. I'm welly broken-hearted, my dear, but no need to talk of it. Go on with thy tale."

"Nay, but I can't give o'er thinking on't!" exclaimed she. "Only yesterday thou wast wild about her."

"Many things have happened since yesterday," I replied sagely. "I will relate the whole tale by-and-by perhaps; but meanwhile I am all impatience for yours."

"Oh, mine!" she returned, "I have not, after all, so much to tell, dear Luke. I was partly teasing thee—a thing I would never have done," said the kind little lass earnestly, "if I had known thou wast really in trouble."

"Thou art a good wench when all's said and done," said I softening. "I knew I could count on thee. I'll tell thee all just now, I say. But let us hear what little thou knows."

We had slipped, both of us, as was our way when confidential into the queer common talk which was familiar to us as children, and which indeed my Father still used as often as not, though when he discoursed with the Quality he could speak as proper as any one.

"Well, Luke," said Patty, "I have found out that Dorothy's Mother died when she was born, and that she was brought up mostly by her Mother's Sister, who died but lately, and left her what fortune she has. She came to tell me in this way. She was talking of Mother one day, and of how much she loved her, and how lucky it was for me that my Father's second choice had been so wise. 'Yes indeed,' said I, 'I'm sure I never had cause to know that she is not my real Mother. I love her as if she was,' said I, 'though I was unwilling enough for my Father to wed again, having been his little housekeeper till I was nine or ten years old—' 'That is like me,' said she, half to herself. 'What,' said I, 'did you lose your Mother too, then?' And then she told me that her Mother died when she was born, and that till she was eight years old she lived alone with her Father. 'And

did you love him very much ?' asked I. 'I think there is no one like a Father, Dorothy.' 'Did I love him?' said she, and clasped her hands—like this—'And was there nobody else to do for you?' I asked her. 'Twas very simple of me, Luke, for I might ha' knowed better. 'There were plenty of servants, of course,' said she. 'My old nurse, Malachi's wife, looked after me for the most part.' 'And did your Father die when you were eight years old?' I inquired, as soft and pitiful as I could, for I cannot think, Luke, what any one could do under such a misfortune—'He died not long after,' said she, and she turned her face away and didn't speak for a bit."

"But how did you hear about the Aunt?" cried I.

"I'm coming to that. I said presently, very respectfully, that I reckoned she was alone after that, and she told me 'No'; at eight years old she had gone to live with a Sister of her Mother's. It was from her she learned all her cleverness in managing farm work and that. Malachi was steward there, she said, and that was why he was so helpful now. 'And was not your Aunt angered at your coming away?' I asked her. 'Oh, my poor Aunt died before I left,' said she. 'She died and her little place being sold I came away with the price of it, which is all my fortune.' 'I wonder why you did that?' says I; and then she kissed me and said, 'Wonder away, little Patty, for that you shall never know'. But now you must tell me your story, Luke."

"First you must promise me not to breathe a word of it to any living soul, man or woman," I said in a very solemn tone. "I think no harm of telling you, Patty, but it must go no further."

"Thou knows I can keep my word," said Patty; and indeed it was the truth. I had never known her break a promise.

So then I told her with great precision and circumstance everything that had taken place since I had resigned her into the hands of Doctor Bradley in the Marl-pit ; and had the satisfaction of seeing her interest and astonishment grow with every word. When I described the strange gentleman her excitement knew no bounds, and when I related how fiercely he had fought Sir Jocelyn, she clutched my arm and fairly stamped her foot.

"I think I hate him !" cried she.

"Oh no," I returned much shocked, "why should you say that, Patty? He is the finest and most personable man you ever saw, and then so noble—so generous. I vow 'twould make your heart leap to hear him speak of Mrs. Dorothy."

"Well," cried she, "I am sure you ought to hate him for that. Lord ! how tame you lads are. I'd never submit to be ordered about that gate ! If I loved a body I'd stick to her like a man, I would. I'd want her all the more if I was told she was too good for me."

"You don't understand," said I, nettled. "'Twas as if my eyes were opened all at once. I knew in a minute she was not for me."

"You was never properly in love with her then," retorted Patty. "I doubt 'twas all a bit o' nonsense—naught but nonsense. If it had ha' been true love you couldn't ha' given over same as that."

"Pray, what do you know about true love?" I asked her, feeling a bit savage at her setting herself up to be my judge.

"I know that much anyway," said she. "'Tis no love worth the name as is gi'en up at anybody's bidding. When I choose a sweetheart I'll stick to him."

"What," cried I, "has somebody been putting notions into your head?"

And I bethought me all at once of Patty's sad looks that morning, and of her unwillingness to dance with Master Robert, and of her speech to me on the same subject; and it came across me all at once, with such a burning indignation as Dorothy's moods had never caused me, that Patty belike had some particular gallant in her mind, whose company she had been loth to miss on the previous night.

"So," I cried hotly, "you deceiving little hussy! You've been carrying on wi' somebody unknown to us all, have you?"

"Why," she returned, innocently, "didn't you know there was a two-three gradely lads after me? What harm, pray, that I should have my woosters like any other lass?"

"But who is it?" I cried hotly, "I am sure neither my Mother nor my Father know you are takin' up wi' any spark in particular. You never used to be sly, Patty—talk o' me bein' changed, I'm sure——"

Here she interrupted me with a mischievous laugh. She had quite laid aside all her plaintiveness and looked as saucy as you please as she stood there under the lilac bush, idly shaking one of the branches so that the blossoms detached themselves and fell about her.

"I'm not quite sure mysel'," answered she, "but for thy comfort I'll put the thing to the test without delay. I'll sew two nuts in my sleeve to-night, and then thou knows, Luke, the first o' the lads they stand for as kisses me is bound to be my Husband. 'Tis a pity we've eaten all our apples, else I'd burn a brace of pips to please ye——"

"For shame of thee!" I cried. "I never knew thee to talk so foolish, Patty. I'm sorry now I so far forgot

myself as to take thee into my confidence, for I see thou doesn't deserve it."

And with that, being in a very ill-humour, I threw down the spade and walked into the house, leaving Patty singing under the lilac-tree.

CHAPTER XIV.

MASTER ROBERT RECEIVES CHASTISEMENT AND SIR JOCELYN A REBUFF.

AFTER a week or two the place had settled down to its customary quiet ; the strangers had gone home again, and our own folks had recovered from the effects of their merry-making and had returned to work, the elders somewhat crusty, the juniors a trifle dull. In my case the holidays had not been prolonged, and I went backwards and forwards between the office and The Delf without any break in the monotony of my life, until one evening about the middle of the month.

My Uncle had entrusted me with a message for Mrs. Dorothy ; some trifling injunction about the mending of a pump or the cleaning of a drain, and I, not ill-pleased at the opportunity for conversing with her, and hearing perchance news of him whom we both loved, set forth after supper to deliver it.

As I turned into the lane which skirted her land and was leisurely pursuing my way, feeling the fresh air grateful after the closeness of the office—indeed, our own parlour had been warm enough that night, for my mother had been ironing some of her fine laces there—and thinking within myself how that foolish wench Patty would have relished the singing of the birds, I was suddenly startled by the sound of raised voices at a little distance from me. A woman's voice—Dorothy's voice—uplifted in wrath and scorn.

"Sir! have you no sense of honour or decency that you presume thus to insult me?"

And then Master Robert's odious tones.

"I vow, my Charmer, you are too cruel. Why should your poor Slave alone be held at arm's length? You could be kind enough on half-an-hour's acquaintance to that town gallant, and Sir Jocelyn seems to think——"

"It is false!" cried she. "Keep your distance, Sir! Oh! you unmanly wretch——"

Then came a scream, and before the sound died away I had rushed round the corner of the lane and gripped Master Robert by the collar just as he had ventured to place his hateful arm round Mrs. Dorothy's waist.

Without pausing to reflect I was proceeding to belabour him with might and main, when the sound of my name called in a commanding tone caused me to look round, and I saw Sir Jocelyn trotting towards us on his tall black horse.

"So!" he cried, "what is this? What is the meaning of this brawl? Luke Wright, how came you to forget yourself so far as to lay hands upon Mr. Bilsborough?"

"Sir Jocelyn," I cried hotly, "I must chastise any man who ventures to insult a defenceless woman, and that woman my neighbour and friend!"

"How now!" cried he, looking eagerly about him, "is Mrs. Ullathorne here?"

"I have just forced this gentleman to release her," I returned, "and I presume while I was chastising him she has made her way homewards."

Raising himself in his stirrups Sir Jocelyn looked over the hedge and caught sight, I suppose, of Dorothy's vanishing figure, for he looked back at his Kinsman with a very dark face.

"'Tis an ugly tale this that I hear about you, Cousin,"

said he. "What, man! Could you be so base as to force yourself upon that unprotected creature? By Heaven, you do deserve a thrashing!"

"I vow, Cousin," returned Master Bilsborough, shaking himself and smoothing his disordered attire, "I vow 'tis a calumny. This young ruffian made a most unprovoked attack upon me. I was discoursing Mrs. Ullathorne with some idle gallantry I confess, but surely such is to be excused in the company of a young and lovely woman. I'll swear there was no harm——"

"You made her scream as how 'tis," I interrupted. "You had your arm round her waist in spite of her struggles, and you was trying to kiss her against her will."

"And so you gave him a drubbing, friend Luke?" said Sir Jocelyn, and his hawk eyes shot flames. "Thou'rt a lad of sense. I think the best thing to be done is to continue operations."

Master Robert started back with a kind of scream like a hare in the jaws of a hound, and the sound turned me sick.

"I can't thrash him in cold blood!" I cried. "Let him off wi' his coat and fight me. Let him stand up to me like a man!"

"Will you fight him, Robert?" asked Sir Jocelyn, still with that gleam in his eye.

"Damnation! Fight him! What are you thinking of, Sir Jocelyn? I fight this clodhopper? Nay, but I'll have him in the Stocks for his impudence!"

"You knave!" exclaimed Sir Jocelyn, riding close up to him. "You base villain! Had you shown a spark of manliness I might have spared you, but being what you are—a cur—you shall take a cur's punishment."

And with that he lashed him across the shoulders several times with his horsewhip, with such a fierce look

on his face the while that I was fairly appalled. His anger was just, no doubt, and had not he chanced to come up Master Robert had as like as not suffered as much and more at my own hands; but to see the fellow stand—he, a grown man—unresisting while Sir Jocelyn whipped him, was so revolting a sight that I could not forbear beseeching the Baronet to stay his hand.

"Well, then, I have done!" cried he. "Go! cur, and remember that curs are not only beaten when they deserve it, but sometimes driven from the door!"

And while Master Robert slunk off Sir Jocelyn, still in a white heat of anger, broke his whip and tossed it from him, because, he said, he would insult no honest nag by using it upon him after such service as it had done that day.

I suppose my face bore some impress of my feelings for he looked at me curiously, and presently laughed.

"You did not think I had it in me to be so savage, eh, Luke?" cried he.

"Indeed I did not," said I, and I could hear that my voice was unsteady.

"I take a deal of rousing," he went on, "but when roused I am a very devil. Think of it, lad—that beautiful girl—that poor lonely girl! No better protection than an infirm old man. Oh, it makes my blood boil! I must to her and apologize. She must learn at once how I condemn such base insolence as this."

He turned towards Lychgate, and I walked beside his horse in silence till we came to the house, where he dismounted, throwing the reins to me.

"I shall not keep you above a minute," said he. "I have no wish to force myself upon her—merely to crave her pardon."

But Malachi arriving declared that his Mistress was in

the garden, and as he took the horse from me I made bold to accompany Sir Jocelyn thither. Indeed he invited me to do so, saying, with that sudden smile of his which made his dark face so pleasant :—

“Come with me, Luke, and satisfy thyself that all is as thou wouldst have it—thou art a lover of fair play, I know ; I would not steal a march on thee”.

“I don’t know what you mean, Sir Jocelyn,” said I awkwardly.

“What !” he returned, “would you deny that you are one of the band of worshippers ?”

“Indeed, Sir Jocelyn,” I returned, “you would make me out too presumptuous.”

“Why, did you not own your devotion to me when Mrs. Ullathorne and I had that little dispute in the road !” he interrupted.

“Since then I have come to know her better,” I answered, “and the more I know of her the more I see how far she is above me, Sir Jocelyn.”

“Yet she lives in as plain a style as the rest of you,” he remarked musingly. “She works, too, with her own hands like any dairywoman, does she not ?”

“She does indeed skim the cream and make the butter, I believe,” I replied, “but for all that I think she is a great lady, Sir Jocelyn.”

“Why, faith, so do I !” cried he, and he clapped me on the shoulder. “Thou art a wise lad of thy years, Luke, and hast learned thy lesson quickly and well. Keep thy distance by all means.”

And with that he pushed open the garden gate and walked in front of me along the narrow path.

Though Mrs. Dorothy’s garden was still somewhat unkempt, a profusion of flowers now grew in it, and the evening air was sweet with them. To calm her spirits,

I suppose, she had taken refuge in the little arbour at the further end, but came forth at sound of approaching steps.

"Madam," said Sir Jocelyn, bowing low, "I intrude on you but for a moment to apologize most humbly for the treatment you have just now received at the hands of a member of my household."

She stood for some time surveying him in silence, looking very straight and tall in her plain black gown, her face seeming more pale than usual to my fancy, though at this twilight hour I was not perhaps competent to judge. After a bit she gave an impatient sigh and said stiffly :—

"Well, Sir, I suppose I must accept your apology, though I cannot forget that you yourself have given the example of disrespect to me. The proverb says truly, 'Like Master, like Man'."

"It does not hold good here, however," returned Sir Jocelyn eagerly. "I assure you most solemnly, Madam, that no one could respect you more than I do."

"Words are idle things," said she sharply. "I have not forgotten, if you have, your insolence to me on two occasions. Mr. Billsborough was present at the first, and no doubt learned from you how safe it was to insult a friendless girl."

I saw Sir Jocelyn wince ; he drew back, and it was a moment before he spoke again. Then :—

"You are too severe, Madam," he said, "I admit, indeed, that I was in fault at that early stage of our acquaintance, but I assure you *insult* is too strong a word to use. I may have permitted myself more freedom of manner then, when I was foolish enough to be deceived by appearances, than I should have ventured upon had I realized, as I do now, that your rank was equal to my own. Surely we

have been very good friends of late since I have discovered your secret——”

She threw out both her hands as if to ward off a blow.

“What do you mean?” she cried.

“Why, that I have found out what requires no very sharp wits to discover, since even honest Luke here has likewise penetrated the mystery. That you are masquerading.”

I saw her lips move, but no sound came forth; her eyes were widely opened as with horror.

“Do you not think,” he said gently, “that we should be dolts were we to take you at your own valuation? Mrs. Dorothy Ullathorne, the dairywoman, who is content to dwell in this tumble-down place so that the rent be small enough to allow her to make a living by her industry! You would have us accept you contentedly as such, asking no questions, feeling no surprise. Whereas the real tenant of Lychgate Hall is——”

“Is what?” she gasped.

“Is a Lady of Quality, hiding herself away for some freak or some folly—as like as not under a false name——”

“Go on, Sir, pray!” she cried as he paused. “Have you any other accusation to bring against me?”

“Indeed,” he returned, still with great gentleness of tone and manner, “I bring no accusation, and you may depend upon my respecting your whim. I wish you to know that I am aware of the part you are playing—that is all. Never again, Madam, shall you have cause to complain that I have overstepped the limits of the courtesy to which you were accustomed—shall I say in a former state of being?”

“I am glad to hear your promise,” she returned, relaxing in some measure. “But understand, Sir Jocelyn, I admit nothing.”

"For that I was quite prepared, Madam," said he, "'tis the way with your sex."

There was a pause ; and then, stepping forward, he took her hand with a mixture of respect and tenderness which she could not resent, and raised it to his lips.

"Let me also understand," he murmured, "that I am forgiven as well for my own sins as for my Kinsman's. I pray you do not hold me accountable for these last. You cannot be more angry than I am—but I have taken order with him and I am very sure he will not again molest you."

"As to that," she interrupted, drawing away her hand and speaking quickly and contemptuously, "I also will take precautions. Pray inform Mr. Bilsborough that it is my intention to go armed for the future."

While Sir Jocelyn was gazing at her half disapprovingly, half admiringly, I broke out, declaring that it was very unsafe for womenfolks to meddle with weapons, and repeating the opinion that I had so often uttered to Mrs. Dorothy herself, that 'twas very dangerous for her to live as she did in so insecure a place and with no better protector than Malachi.

She was turning towards me with a vexed air to reprove me, I suppose, for my meddlesomeness, when Sir Jocelyn struck in once more.

"Do not trouble thyself, my good Luke ; a lady's whim will not endure for ever. Moreover, even should she remain staunch to her freak, Fate itself will interpose. Some day, Madam, whether you will it or no, you must surrender yourself into safer keeping than your own. There are many who love you ; some day you must make your choice."

"Do not speak to me of love," she cried. "I have nothing to do with love—I only ask for peace. Why

should every one conspire to deprive me of it?" Then waving her hand impatiently—"Go! go!" she said. "Nay, Sir Jocelyn, I would not have you think me uncivil, but if you knew how weary I am, and how heavy of heart! Can you not leave me alone?"

"As you will," said he; and he bowed and was turning to go when he paused midway. "I wish you to understand, Madam," said he, "that I am your friend—more than your friend. I am ready to fight your battles; to go your errands; to obey you in all things save one. I must rebel when you desire me not to love you."

Then he turned and was gone, striding along the moss-grown path into the dusk.

"Take him away, Luke," whispered she, as I lingered a moment to deliver my Uncle's message. "Oh, Luke, I want none of his love."

And then I, too, went my way down the path, and, turning at the gate, glanced back to where she stood at the entrance of the shadowy arbour; and she waved her hand to me and disappeared within it. But before I reached the yard I heard the clatter of Sir Jocelyn's horse's hoofs.

CHAPTER XV.

ST. JOHN'S EVE.

ON St. John's Eve we had supper early at The Delf that we might go down to Ferneby Green to see the sport there. The house was topsy-turvy, as usual, on that day, for the lasses were all agog to chase their Woosters between the bonfires. Susan had scarce patience to give the oat cakes their due meed of baking, in such haste was she to don her finery and be off; so that my Father grumbled over the meal, for though he liked his cut of meat as well as another, and stood in need of it too, my Mother declared, (being such a big-framed man) he was wont to consider no fare worth eating that did not comprise a good slice of jannock.

I kept my eye on Patty during the repast, and as she stepped past me over the threshold I took the opportunity to catch her by the sleeve.

"For shame o' thee!" she cried, pulling away from me. "What art doin'? Thou'rt crushing my dress."

"I'm looking for the nuts," said I. "Didst sew them in last night?"

She began to laugh, but shook her head, and I was pleased, for 'twould have vexed me to think she might attach particularity to so idle a custom.

Before we came in sight of the green we heard the crackling and roaring of the fires, and the shouts of the children, and the cheers of the lusty lads who tossed on fresh bundles of fuel.

The young folks were all hard at work, if one may use such an expression, but indeed they devoted themselves to their pastimes with more vigour, I doubt, than they bestowed on serious matters. A group of boys and girls were having a match at Stool-ball, kisses being prizes, observing which I jerked Patty on, for, as I told her, she had now grown too old for such sports. Elsewhere the game of Kittlepins was in progress; Barley-brake was as usual much in favour, and loud laughter proceeded from a merry company that were playing Drawing Dun out of the Mire. In front of the Merry Ploughboys there were some tables set out for as many of the elders as cared for more quiet games, such as Tick-tack or Seize Noddy, Maw and Buff; and the Landlord and his Wife were kept busy carrying tankards of beer to those who sat at them, card-playing being apparently thirsty work.

The great amusement of the evening, however, was the dancing round the bonfires, and the chasing each other by the young folks of both sexes. As we stood watching, Patty gave a sudden little chuckle and darted from my side, and presently I saw her flitting in and out between the blazing piles, her white dress conspicuous among the coloured prints worn by the Ferneby lasses, and her pink ribbons fluttering wildly, looking like streamers of fire in the ruddy light.

"Ho! ho!" cried my Father, "the little wench has started. Who's after her? That's Long Tom for sure, and t'other lad is Neighbour Thornton's John, isn't he? Ho! ho! ho! Ah! 'tis young John o' the Mill—a likely lad, too. I knowed he was sweet on our Patty——"

I waited to hear no more, and though I had not intended to join in the sports, considering myself too old and too wise, and perhaps too well-to-do in the world to

take part in such senseless pranks, I set off at once in hot pursuit of Patty. My long legs carried me over the ground at an amazing pace, though I paused a moment to trip up Tom Burnley, sending him on his back with a suddenness which set the folks a-roaring, and as I passed John Thornton o' James's I gave him a nudge with my elbow that sent him spinning among the lasses who were running the contrary way.

I came up with our Patty in a jiffy and flung my arms about her, and she screamed and ducked her head down, so that her captor (whom she knew not to be myself) should not snatch his meed of kisses. I kissed the saucy elbow of her, however, which she had raised in self-defence, and she turned on me in a moment like a little wild-cat.

"Ha' done, Tom, thou impudent fellow! I'll—
What, 'tis thee, Luke, is it?"

"It's me," I answered, "and a nice scratch thou gave me."

"I thought 'twas Long Tom," said she.

"Won't Long Luke do as well," I asked her, "or is the disappointment a sore one?"

"Oh, no disappointment at all," she replied very demurely, and she pulled down her sleeve over her elbow. "I'm sorry I scratched thee, Luke."

"Well, I'm glad," said I. "'Twould be very proper in thee to scratch Tom if he made so free with thee."

"I never reckoned thou'd run after me," said she, in such a small, gentle voice that I was quite surprised.

"I'll run again," said I, "if thou runs again, Patty. I'll not have thee caught by anybody but me."

She heaved a deep sigh and slipped her arm through mine.

"I doubt thou'rt right," she murmured. "We are both

too old for such sports, aren't we? Let's walk round and watch the others."

I was so accustomed to the mocking ways of the little wench, and to her teasing habit, that I scarce knew what to make of this new mood of hers, and for a time was on the look-out for some trick which she should prepare under cover of apparent softness. And to this day I can never tell whether or no she had such a notion in her mind, for our share in the merry-making was brought to an end by a most untoward accident.

My good Father had been watching the games with great enjoyment, laughing as heartily over the antics of the young ones as any among them, and helping to keep the blaze alive by piling on bundles of brushwood and dry gorse. He was most amused by watching the fun afoot near these fires, and I suppose his eyes were dazed by the glare, for when later in the evening he came in search of us, he failed to see a log of wood which the lads who had been playing Drawing Dun out of the Mire had left in the road, and stumbling over it fell heavily to the ground.

A dozen hands were stretched out to help him in a moment, but he called out to the folks to be careful how they lifted him, for he was sure his leg was broke. And such indeed proved to be the case—a double fracture, no less—for he was a heavy man, and being taken unawares had not been able in any way to save himself.

Well, he was put upon a hurdle and carried home, the rest of us accompanying him, the mournful little procession being closed by Sukey, who was sobbing loudly because, as she said, she might at least ha' done the jannock to the Gaffer's liking.

There was no way of getting the dear good man up our narrow stairway at The Delf, so we made him up a bed in the parlour, and my Mother and Patty, with much

weeping, divested him of his best jersey coat, and the flowered waiscoat which he had worn at his wedding, and which my Mother had been letting out year by year, as his figure grew more corpulent, till the plain stuff which had at first formed the back crept ever into a more prominent position.

I untied the knees of his breeches, and freed the injured limb as much as I could, but the good leather clung to his sturdy thighs so close that I found 'twould be impossible to remove the garment without cutting it, and this he would not hear of. A dispute arose between us also as to the setting of his leg; for he himself was bent on having the Horse-Doctor, who sometimes also did a little business in the matter of mending human bones, and my Mother and I were for summoning Doctor Bradley. After a hot discussion it was finally agreed that Thomas o' Bab's should be called in to put the leg in splints, and that Doctor Fanny should subsequently cup and blister the patient.

Honest Thomas duly arrived and was about to proceed to business, when, on stripping down the coverlet, he discovered that my Father was only partially undressed.

"Hullo! this 'ull noan do," cried he in his broad way. "I mun ha' these breeches off, else we'll ne'er make a good job on yo', Gaffer!"

"Well, an' how do ye reckon to get 'em off?" says my Father, quite quiet.

"Eh, they do seem to fit tight," says Thomas, "we mun pull a bit, Luke and me. Here, Luke, catch howd o' t'other side and show thy muscle. Eh, mon, they're awful tight. Pull away, Luke!"

But here my Father gives a shout that could very like be heard at Lychgate, and he catches Thomas by the collar and nigh throttles him.

"Hold hard!" he cries, "what do you think I'm made on?"

So Thomas let go, and scratched his head a bit, and looked round at me.

"I reckon we mun cut 'em off, Luke," says he.

"Cut up my new breeches," cries my Father, "you'll do naught o' the kind; I'll not have it. Dun yo' think I've naught better to do wi' my brass nor wear it on breeches? These 'ere is quite new. I nobbut had 'em made at Martinmas. I reckoned they'd do me for Sundays and that while I live, and when I'm gone Johnny can finish 'em out o' weekdays—cut 'em up, indeed!"

"Well, Gaffer," says Thomas very seriously, "whatever mun we do? If we don't get these 'ere breeches off afore we set your leg, ye'll noan be able to take 'em off at arter. An' yo may be lyin' here for six weeks or two month."

"Then I'll wear my breeches for six weeks or two month," said my Father firmly. "So you can get agate and finish wi' the job wi'out no more palaver!"

"Wear his best breeches for six weeks!" cries my Mother. "Eh, dear o' me, whatever mun we do? They'll be fair ruined."

"Well, I'll noan have 'em cut!" says my Father.

My Mother stood by groaning and wringing her hands, and Thomas o' Bab's got to work as well as he could, and my father smoked a pipe and never made a sound, though I doubt it must have hurt him sore to have his leg so twisted about.

When all was over, he and Thomas had a bowl of punch together, and then the old fellow went off, turning at the door to ask my Father if he felt himself pretty comfortable.

"Comfortable enough," says he, "a deal comfortabler nor if my new breeches was spoilt,"

But what with the punch, and what with the pain of the fracture, and what with the swelling of the injured limb, he was in a fever by the morning, and I set off by daybreak to summon Doctor Bradley.

When he arrived he made a regular outcry at my Father's plight, and vowed he could do nothing for him unless he consented to have the obnoxious garments removed and the leg reset.

"I'll not ha' the leather cut," says my Father, just as obstinate with the Gentleman-Doctor as he had been with good old Thomas.

"Why, then," says Doctor Fanny, "I believe there is nothing to be done but to send for Lady Gillibrand. I think she is the only person in the parish who can make a pig-headed man hear reason."

"I don't want no womenfolk," grumbled my Father, who was now so beside himself with pain and fever that he scarce knew what he said. "I vow I'll have no womenfolk making a pother here."

"Oh, Forshaw," says my Mother, "how can you speak so of my Lady! Pray excuse him, Doctor Bradley."

"What has her Ladyship to do with my breeches?" said my father.

Growing ever more and more red in the face, and more irritated in temper, he repeated his resolution, whereupon Doctor Bradley assured him that if he did not yield he would of a certainty regret it all his life.

"For," said he, "during the rest of your days you will go about turning out your toes like a French Dancing-Master; for the leg is set completely crooked. A nice thing that for an honest Englishman. Moreover, it is extremely doubtful if ever you will be able to ride again."

I saw by my Father's face that these last words had made some impression, but whether he would have ulti-

mately yielded had not Sir Jocelyn come upon the scene is doubtful.

At this moment, however, to our great joy, we saw his comely form appear in the doorway, and he called out cheerily to know what was to do.

"I heard you were laid by the heels," said he, "but what is all this din about? I'm sure 'tis very bad for a sick man to be thwarted. Pray, what are they bullying you about, honest James?"

My Father with much heat explained the situation, amid frequent interruptions from my Mother and Doctor Bradley; and Sir Jocelyn burst out laughing when the tale was ended.

"Why here's a piece of work about nothing," cried he. "Surely, good folks, there is a very easy way out of the difficulty, and you might have had the wit to think of it. Give me the scissors, Dame Forshaw? Now down with the blankets, James, my friend."

And Sir Jocelyn, sitting up against my Father's bed, began with great care and patience to unpick the outer seam of the famous breeches; nor did he pause until he had completed the job. Then handing the scissors to my mother, he requested her to do the same on the other leg, so that in a short space of time my father was entirely freed. Then the unfortunate leg was reset, and after Doctor Fanny had blooded the patient above the knee, so as to keep the inflammation from going up, and blistered him at the sole of the foot so as to draw the evil humours down, and prescribed sundry Draughts and Boluses, he said farewell, leaving my Father extremely exhausted but satisfied, under the conviction that everything had been done for him which could possibly be done, and that he was in consequence saved from the necessity of turning out his toes like a French Dancing-Master.

Later in the afternoon Lady Gillibrand was good enough to call and inquire how he found himself; and was even so condescending as to take a chair by his bedside and read him a little tract entitled, "On Present Misfortunes being sent by Providence in Punishment of Bygone Errors"; and she advised the sick man to utilize the ample time which was now given him for reflection in penitential meditation.

"Time enough indeed, Madam," says he with a groan. "However they'll get the hay in with me laid by, I can't think—and me so behind already."

"Ah!" says my Lady, "you must not let these things weigh on you now, Forshaw. I fear indeed you've been too much taken up with the cares of the world."

"Not so much wi' the cares of the world, your Ladyship," says my poor Father very dolefully, "I never was one to think much about the world. 'Tis the hay as troubles me, and the weedin' o' the barley, as should ha' been done a two-three week ago—only we was kept so late over everything."

Thereupon her Ladyship discoursed with him more plainly, exhorting him to cast off the yoke of the Flesh and devote himself more to the Spirit, upon which my Father, in a humble tone, returned that though he had always been used to a tankard of ale he would give it up during his illness and take what she desired him.

Patty, who was in the room at the time, told me she could see very well that the poor man, who was somewhat light in the head after all he had gone through, had no notion at all of Lady Gillibrand's meaning. Indeed, his mind was running all the time upon quite another kind of spirit, as subsequently appeared; for when my Mother brought him a jack of small-beer at supper-time he discarded it in favour of gin and water, because, said

he, her Ladyship had desired him to have more regard for the spirit.

His answer started Lady Gillibrand on a fresh topic.

"Ha!" cried she, "that reminds me of another point. Pray, where is your Wife?—Ho! Dame Forshaw! Are you there?"

My Mother, who had remained respectfully without, as her Ladyship had not previously invited her to enter, now came hurrying forward.

"Pray, my good woman," said Lady Gillibrand, "what are you giving your Husband in the matter of food? It is very needful that I should advise you about this as I find people of your order so frequently make sickness an excuse for extravagance."

My Mother looked somewhat offended at this, Patty said, and replied that she was sure she had no mind to be extravagant, and though she strove to keep as near as might be to the Doctor's orders, she did not consider herself bound to obey them when they led to unnecessary waste.

"For instance, my Lady," said she, "Doctor Bradley was very particular about my Gaffer having no butcher's stuff for a bit——"

"I told her Ladyship," interrupted my Father—"her Ladyship thinks the same, Missus—I told her Ladyship I were willing to give up flesh meat."

"Yes, my Lady," says my Mother, taking him up before Lady Gillibrand could remark on what he said. "Doctor Bradley said my Master was to have fish, or fowl, or such-like, and our Luke shall bring me a few red herrin' from Upton—but as for fowl, my Lady, I'm sure 'twould be a sin to kill any o' the chickens just now. They're that small, owin' to the late season, he'd want two or three for a meal. So, your Ladyship, I've got a nice sucking-

pig ready—I'm sure there couldn't be nothing lighter than that—and he shall have it to-morrow to his dinner wi' a bit o' sage and onion and some apple sauce. By good luck I have a few pippins still laid by in sand, my Lady, and——”

“Sucking-pig!” cried Lady Gillibrand in her shrillest tones. “Woman, do you want to kill your Husband? I have no patience with Doctor Bradley, I declare. Fish and fowl indeed, as if he were prescribing for a Person of Quality! But sucking-pig, and the man in a high fever! It's my belief, Dame Forshaw, that if you give your Husband sucking-pig you may as well order his coffin. Oatmeal gruel,” said her Ladyship emphatically, “made very thin, and eaten with a slice of barley-bread—a basin of bread and milk, perhaps, or some thin broth, or toast and barley-water—that's how you should feed your Husband at present. 'Tis both more becoming to his station and more suitable to his state. I'll send Mrs. Dugden this evening to you with a little paper I have lately read which much pleased me, and which I intend to distribute largely among the tenants of the estate. It is entitled, ‘On the Evil of Pampering the Body, with some Reflections on the unhappy Consequences of Extravagance’. Do you realise, Dame Forshaw, that if that sucking-pig were not sacrificed to your whim it might grow up to be a great source of profit to you? You might have several litters of young and thriving——”

“Please, my Lady,” interrupted my Mother very humbly, “it isn't a sow——”

“Where are your manners?” returned Lady Gillibrand severely. “Oh, fie! fie! for shame, and I thought you a well-spoken woman for your condition in life. Did ever anybody hear the like? I vow I am surprised at you. Learn to bridle your tongue, Dame Forshaw, and never

to interrupt your betters, more particularly if you have a mind to contradict them. I should not have thought you would have been so ungrateful—you scarce deserve that I should visit you and take the trouble to give you so much good advice."

My poor Mother apologized profusely, and my Father murmured some conciliatory speech from beneath his blankets ; but her Ladyship was not to be mollified, and sailed out of the house with such an indignant face that Mrs. Penny, whom she had left seated in the pony-chaise, looked scared out of her wits as she hastily descended to allow her patroness to take her place in the vehicle. When they drove away together Lady Gillibrand's tones were heard in shrill condemnation of some error on her poor dependant's part, and as they turned the corner of the lane Mrs. Penny was observed to be wiping her eyes.

CHAPTER XVI.

VISITORS TO THE SICK ROOM.

THOUGH my Father's illness brought about, of necessity, many changes in our mode of life, and much disorganization into our quiet household, I could never have guessed that it would cause a sequence of events which would affect the lives of other and more important folks. Yet such was the case, though the circumstances which entailed such serious consequences were of themselves very trifling.

Every one was sorry for the helpless plight of a man so active as my Father, and our neighbours of all degree sought to render his captivity less irksome to him. Thus it occurred to Parson Formby to send him a parcel of books one day, and as neither my Mother nor Patty were great readers, and these volumes appeared to contain a variety of long and crabbed words, it was a boon to the family when Dorothy Ullathorne proposed to make him acquainted with the contents. She, who had always felt so kindly to him, appeared to find pleasure now in keeping him company, and endeavouring to lighten his weariness. She drew up her chair to his bedside indeed, Patty said, with as much alacrity as though she had been his own child, and reading the titles aloud of the different books, inquired which he would have.

"Do you choose," said she, "*Doctor Hammond's Tracts*, or *Ark of the Testament*, *Opened by Master George Gillespie*, or *Bishop Rust's Discourse of Truth*——"

"That might do me good," says my poor Father ; and Patty said he eyed the volume less dismally than the others, for it was a small one.

"Or will you," went on Mrs. Dorothy, "have this one, *Dry Rod Blooming and Fruit Bearing?* It is by one George Hughes of Plymouth, and is over sixty years old—indeed most of Mr. Formby's books seem to be somewhat ancient."

"Eh, I think I could fancy that," cried my Father eagerly, "rod-blooming, did ye say, my dear? That'll be summat about grafting on these here briar stocks. And fruit bearing—eh, I've knowed some funny things come about out o' these meddlin's wi' Nature. I've heard my Grandfather tell a tale of how he planted some cherry stones from a tree as was grafted on an Ash, and naught but little Ash saplings comed up. Ah, I think I could like very well to listen to yon book."

"But Dorothy didn't seem altogether satisfied," said Patty, relating the tale to me. "'There's another title to it,' says she, '*A Treatise of the Pain and Gain of Chastenings, partly in Several Sermons.*' 'Sermons,' says my Father, disappointed-like, and then Dorothy began reading, and it was that melancholy I could very nigh have cried mysel' ; and the poor dear Man sighed till your heart 'ud bleed to hear him, and then he took to yawning, till I was afeared she'd think him unmannerly ; and he was very nigh asleep, when who should walk in but Sir Jocelyn. He looked first at my Father's dismal face, and then at the books, and then at Dorothy.

"'Are you all doing penance here?' asked he. 'Tis a bit too much of a good thing to my mind. Is not a broken leg enough for you, Friend James?'

"'Parson Formby sent 'em,' says my Father, 'twas

very kind of him, I'm sure. He reckoned I must be dull lying here all day.'

"Sir Jocelyn took up the books one by one, and laughed again. 'I think I can find something more cheerful for you,' said he. 'I have some numbers of the *Flying Post* and of the *Daily Courant*, giving all the latest news from Holland and Paris, which I have no doubt Mrs. Ullathorne will be good enough to explain to you, and I have besides several numbers of the *Spectator*, a paper which very much delights myself, and which I am sure you would find diverting, particularly those pages relating to Sir Roger de Coverley.' Then, turning to Dorothy he inquired if she would be likely to be here again to-morrow, and on her replying that it was her custom, since my Father's illness, to pass every day some time in his company, he informed her that he would himself bring the paper in question. 'For,' said he, 'I can then point out to you those items which are most likely to be of interest to our Friend.' Do you know, Luke, that I cannot forbear thinking that Sir Jocelyn admires Dorothy more and more every day?"

"'Twill avail him little then," said I, "for she vows she wants none of his love."

"Folks change their minds sometimes though," says Patty, "don't they, Luke?"

"Do you mean me, Madam?" said I.

"Whom the cap fits," said she, and ran away.

When I came home from the office on the following evening I found Sir Jocelyn installed on one side of my Father's bed and Mrs. Ullathorne on the other, the latter reading aloud in a voice both sweet and gay, and frequently interrupting herself by a burst of laughter. Indeed, they all seemed to be very merry; I had not seen my Father look so cheerful since his misfortune,

while Sir Jocelyn, leaning back in his chair, had his smiling eyes fixed upon the reader.

I crossed the room softly and sat down by the window ; and Mrs. Ullathorne, turning to me with a nod of recognition, said :—

“We are learning about a certain Sir Roger de Coverley, Luke, whom Mr. Forshaw thinks must be a very worthy man ”.

“Did you ever meet him, Sir Jocelyn?” interrupted my Father eagerly. “He seems to be a noble Gentleman, and wonderful good to the poor.”

Sir Jocelyn and Mrs. Ullathorne looked at each other and laughed, which my Father perceiving, he began to explain that as Sir Jocelyn was Sir Jocelyn, and Sir Roger was Sir Roger, and both were very kind-hearted gentlemen, he thought they might have some acquaintance together.

“But of course,” he added, “he must be a deal older nor your Honour.”

“Indeed, I would like very well to know him,” said Sir Jocelyn, “for every one who has heard of him seems to love him.”

“He’s a bit simple, though, in the matter o’ coortin’,” said my Father. “Eh, he don’t seem to ha’ much notion o’ how to deal wi’ a Woman—more particular a Widow. Eh, Luke, my lad, I was not that soft wi’ thy Mother. She and me walked together a bit, when we was both young things, but she couldn’t make up her mind whether she’d have me or thy Father ; so I just took and married Patty’s Mother, as I knowed were willin’. Well, the poor little body died when the lass was born, but your Mother was wed by that time. However, when she were a widow, I went to her again as soon as were decent. ‘Wilt ha’ me now?’ I says. ‘Oh, James,’ says she, ‘hadn’t we

better wait a bit?' 'Nay,' says I, 'I can't wait. If you can't make up your mind, my dear,' says I, 'there's plenty as will. There's Moggy Wainwright o' John's o' William's as 'ud do me as well as another, I daresay.' Well, she come round on the minute," said my Father emphatically, "on the very minute."

Sir Jocelyn looked across at Mrs. Ullathorne with a laughing face, but she did not meet his eye, and I saw that she had a vexed look.

"What," said he then, addressing my Father, "would you have him threaten the perverse Widow, as you threatened your good Dame, that he would pay his court elsewhere if she remained obdurate?"

"Nay, but I'd ha' had him do it," says my Father, and then he winked both eyes together, after a fashion he had when he wished to appear amazingly sly. "She'd ha' come round fast enough then, I'll uphold you."

"You cannot judge all women after your standard," cried Mrs. Ullathorne sharply; it was the first time I had heard her speak harshly to my Father since that bygone day when she had flouted him about the horse.

"Why then," said he, not at all abashed, "I'd ha' had him wed that there Madame Truby; she was a deal more suited to him to my mind nor t'other stuck-up baggage; and she had a nice bit o' brass too."

"You have a very poor opinion of him then," said Mrs. Ullathorne angrily. "Do you think the man a weathercock that he should turn from one to another so easily? To my mind there is something noble in his constancy. Better be faithful to a single love, even if it be an unhappy one, than be content with the next best."

She addressed my Father, but I think she meant the words for Sir Jocelyn, who responded in the same manner.

"Now I, for one, agree with you, James, but what I marvel at most is that the Widow in question should have remained so long without being linked to a second partner. For since she could not or would not accept Sir Roger, it seems to me that this hesitancy was another man's opportunity. And I wonder that some determined wooer did not take advantage of her very weariness to press his suit."

"Nay, now," cried Mrs. Ullathorne, with sparkling eyes, "now, Mr. Forshaw, you are unduly hard upon the Lady, for surely if she would not accept Sir Roger, whom she perhaps liked very well, she would not have taken another to whom she was indifferent?"

"But don't you see, honest James," said Sir Jocelyn, "that cannot have been any very strong love which continued in so persistent a denial?"

Here Mrs. Dorothy rose to her feet; she was quite pale and spoke in a choked voice.

"I cannot sit still and listen to such sentiments," she cried. "I would have you to know that there is sometimes more generosity in withholding than in giving."

This time her eyes and those of Sir Jocelyn met, and as the Baronet did not answer my Father, who had not been able to get in a word edgewise, and who had been looking from one to the other in great astonishment, for the excitement of both was evident, announced it as his opinion that all women were very much alike, and so for the matter of that were all men, and that if a couple couldn't agree to take each other, why there were plenty more folks to be had for the asking.

Sir Jocelyn laughed, but Dorothy, who could not be prevailed upon to take the matter lightly, remarked with a clouded brow that it was time for her to return home.

"But ye'll come to-morrow, won't ye, my dear?" asked

my Father. "Eh, 'tis the only hour o' the day that I feel myself happy, and there seems to be a lot o' readin' in these here papers still."

"Yes, I'll come to-morrow," said she in a gentler tone, as she took the big brown hand that lay outside the coverlet.

I had been sitting mute in the window-seat all this time, and now rising asked permission to see Mrs. Dorothy home.

But Sir Jocelyn waved me back.

"No, Luke, my friend, unless Mrs. Ullathorne particularly wishes for your company, I should prefer you to remain behind. I intend to be myself the Lady's escort if she will permit it, and on our way to Lychgate we shall continue our discussion of Sir Roger de Coverley's love affair."

"I have no wish to pursue the subject further," she remarked petulantly.

"At least," said he gently, "let us explain our views more clearly." Then, with a twinkling of his eye, "Surely you are not afraid to cross a lance with me?"

She turned to him then with rising colour. "Afraid! no indeed! But I know we should never agree, and, moreover, I could not expect you to enter into my feelings."

"Try me," said he, stepping back to let her pass before him, and speaking gently and persuasively.

But I could see that his recently expressed sentiments had startled and irritated her, and if she suffered his company it was rather that she might, by speaking her mind, lay at rest certain qualms of her own than for his satisfaction. Scarcely had they crossed the threshold before she turned upon him with—

"If you believe that there is no such thing as self-

sacrifice in woman, or fidelity in man, it is useless to continue the argument."

Then, as they stepped away across the yard, I heard Sir Jocelyn's deep tones—"Madam, I hold there is no more admirable quality in man than his fidelity, either to a passion or a purpose; and as to self-sacrifice in woman, I would examine its nature e'er I venture to pronounce".

I heard no more, but on returning to the parlour I found my Father chuckling to himself.

"I tell thee what, my lad," said he, "there's like to be wigs upon the green afore aught's long. Her Ladyship 'ull be neither to hold nor to bind if things falls out as they're shaping."

As I made no reply he exclaimed impatiently: "What! doesn't thou see how thick they're gettin'?"—jerking his thumb in the direction taken by our visitors—" 'twill be a match as sure as my name's James Forshaw."

"Never!" cried I with conviction, and I thought of Mrs. Dorothy's jealous distress at the mere suggestion that a rejected lover could find consolation elsewhere.

"Eh, thou Leather-head," cried my Father, "isn't Sir Jocelyn rich enough and grand enough to do as he pleases, and isn't that fine lass bonny enough to wed wi' a King? Why shouldn't he have her?"

"Nay, but I think that she won't have him," said I, a remark which my Father took in very ill part, observing that, though I might be a fool, there was no need for thinking other folks the same, and that to his mind Mrs. Dorothy was a lass of sense.

"Nevertheless, Sir," said I diffidently, for my Father was not one who brooked contradiction, "I doubt Sir Jocelyn would take it ill if we was to notice his inclination; and I am sure Mrs. Ullathorne would be much hurt——"

"Pray," interrupted he sharply, "pray who is noticing his inclination except in a private way? Did you ever know me tattle wi' folks that you must needs bother me wi' such counsels? Keep thy breath to cool thy porridge," cried my Father, thumping the bed-clothes, "teach thy Granny to suck eggs! Pretty times indeed when a lad as has scarce cut his eye-teeth gets agate o' lecturin' his Parents. Off wi' thee to the garden and let's have more doin' and less pratin'."

Thereupon, realizing that there was nothing more to be said, I took off my coat and went away very humbly to join Patty.

For many days after, Sir Jocelyn and Mrs. Dorothy met regularly by my Father's bedside; and though they discoursed but little in a direct fashion with each other, I could not but fancy that the intimacy advanced apace. And Patty was of the same way of thinking, and would sometimes ask me with an arch look who had been in the right, and whether female wits were not, after all, the quickest. And sometimes she would inquire with mock commiseration how I would like to wear the willow (pretending on these occasions to have forgot my confession in the garden), and at other times she would rub her hands and chuckle, and desire to know if I did not consider that Mrs. Ullathorne would make a beautiful Lady Gillibrand, and exclaim over the wrath and discomfiture of the present sole owner of that title.

And though I still tried to believe in Mrs. Dorothy's constancy, there were days when I could not but think regretfully of my Master fretting in exile, and wonder what he would say did he know how much of her company his lady bestowed on another man, and of the quiet but determined siege which the latter laid to her heart. It was true many little circumstances conspired to bring

this state of affairs about ; to begin with these were busy times with us, and my Father would have passed many lonely hours had it not been for these visits of hers ; then again her own affairs perforce occupied her during the day, so that her evenings alone were free. But, indeed, had she timed her visits earlier it would have availed her little, for Sir Jocelyn would have made sure of appearing at the same moment, bringing his papers.

Thus, as I say, Sir Jocelyn stayed by while Mrs. Dorothy read aloud in her clear voice ; and when she paused to make the meaning of a word or sentence plainer to my Father, he would chime in ; and when she broke off to laugh over some droll sentiment or curious conceit, she would catch his eye, which was, to be sure, never very far from her face, and they would enjoy the humour of the writer together. I could not help thinking that, quite unconsciously, she learned to expect this unspoken sympathy and even to appeal to it, and though I was sometimes uneasy I could not blame her, for after all she was a woman of parts and understanding, and Sir Jocelyn alone, of all her acquaintance in our neighbourhood, was her equal alike in wit and in rank.

CHAPTER XVII.

HAYMAKING AND MISCHIEF-MAKING.

IT was a week or two after my Father's accident that I asked and obtained Uncle Waring's permission to join in the making of Mrs. Ullathorne's hay. It was the custom in that part of the countryside to help a new-comer in some such manner, either by performing a certain amount of boon-ploughing or by lending a hand in haymaking or harvesting. It was my Father who suggested to many of the neighbours that it would be a kind thing to help the new tenant to get in her hay instead of putting off their good offices till the autumn, the season being a late one and the weather uncertain.

"Moreover," says he, "it will learn her to make friends wi' you all. The lass is a fine lass," says he, "and the more you know her the better you'll like her. I found that out for myself. 'Twill do you no harm to be a bit friendly to a lonesome wench, and I doubt you may all be glad enough some day or other to ha' been neighbourly wi' her."

I was up at dawn on the first day of the haymaking, the happiest lad in the countryside as I put on the old smock that I had not worn since I had begun to be a Lawyer, and reached down my battered straw hat from its peg.

My Father called to me as I stepped past the parlour.

"Thou art early afoot, lad."

"I wanted to make the most o' my time," said I, thrusting in my face at the door.

He groaned and rolled his head on the pillow.

"Eh, I could wish I were going wi' thee! What a big upstanding chap thou art i' thy smock! Thou'd make a gradely farmer; but stick to the Law, Luke. Stick to the Law!" he added almost sternly, seeing, I suppose, the longing which I could never repress leap into my eyes.

Armed with scythe and whetstone I swung over the ground, and had made a good inroad into the meadow before any one was astir at Lychgate.

Oh! the delight of sending my scythe sweeping through the tall grass while the dew was yet upon it, and seeing it fall over in regular curves, the sweet savour of the cut stems mounting to my nostrils, the air cool and fresh and full of the spicy smell of the short summer's night; no noise except the swinging of my blade and the soft swish of the falling grass, save that now and then there came a cawing from the rookery or a great flapping of wings as a pigeon flew over my head. I was almost sorry when my peaceful solitude was broken in upon by a concourse of merry neighbours. Soon indeed the whole field was a scene of indescribable bustle and excitement; folks running hither and thither, some bantering me for my jealous zeal in thus getting to work before they had even arrived, some calling loudly for the Mistress, others as loudly claiming a pot of small-beer before beginning their labours. The hubbub and confusion was at its height when Dorothy herself appeared, and after greeting the newcomers very kindly beckoned to her own labourers and dairy-wenches, and retiring with them for a few moments led them back laden with abundance of good-cheer, which she desired them to set before the company.

It was a marvel to see how the food disappeared. Great pitchers of small-beer, foaming cans of new milk, goodly slices of oat-cake and home-made cheese, made in South-country fashion and differing in look and flavour from our Lancashire stuff, but none the less toothsome for that.

Dorothy flitted from one to another, talking to each with an air at once gracious and timid, which seemed to win all hearts, serving her guests with her own hands, pressing her hospitality upon them until they vowed they would be fit for naught if she did not give over.

Work now began in earnest—the men stationed at regular intervals, the womenfolk behind them, raking and tossing the hay.

Dorothy worked with the rest; she was like one of ourselves in earnest that day, clad in a plain linen gown, and wearing an untrimmed straw hat on her dark locks; her face was glowing with exercise, and each movement of her round arms and supple figure was, I thought, more beautiful than the last. She seemed to have laid aside all care with her dignity, for I heard her voice ring merrily across the field many a time and her laugh peal out. The sun was now high, and as the day advanced grew extremely hot; but I for one was well content. I am never too hot—not when sunshine is in question, for I own I dislike as much as any one a close room or too great a burden of garments. But to stand as I stood that summer's day, with the warm rays striking down from the sky, and the glow striking upward again from the heated earth, it seemed to warm my heart itself, and to make it leap for gladness. We have always a breeze here, blowing in, salt and free, from the sea, and I had opened my smock at the neck and rolled up its loose sleeves—which were indeed become too short—so as to

let the bonny air play about me ; and as I set my legs apart and swung my body to the full sweep of the scythe I felt ever growing within me the pride of my own strength, and the joy of young and lusty manhood. And I scarce knew which I liked the best after all, my quiet hour when I had been alone with the dawn, or this hour of teeming life when I stood amidst my fellows and laboured with the rest—but better than the rest. Sure, there was never before so merry a din kept up in the neighbourhood of that solemn place, for what with the cheerful whetting of the scythe, and the sound of the circling blades, and the chirruping of the grasshoppers, and the hum of summer insects, and the talk and laughter of the lads and lasses, there was a very babel of joyous sound.

The whole field was cut an hour or two after the noon-day meal, and then we laid aside our scythes and armed ourselves with rakes and pikels, and fell to tossing the grass with the lasses. To this day, when I think on it, I call to mind the good smell of the stuff ; for there was a deal of clover in it, and round about the edge of the field had been a fringe of meadowsweet, which was laid low with the grass. I doubt the scent of Mrs. Ullathorne's hayfield must have hung upon the breeze for nigh a mile around.

A number of children had found their way into the field, and were by way of helping us, tossing up the hay into the air with their little arms and turning it over with forked sticks ; but they soon tired of this, and fell to rolling each other about, and building themselves castles and what not. I mind a cry rose all at once that there was a lark's nest in a corner of the meadow, and when we turned our heads there was a great circle of hay with a cluster of little ones in the middle, flapping their arms

for wings, and making believe to chirp, and opening wide little round red mouths into which our Patty, as the mother-bird, dropped sugar plums.

Patty, with her dress tucked up over her striped petticoat, and wielding a wooden rake a good deal taller than herself, thought to be very busy and flitted about the field, here and there and everywhere, with a nod for this one and a smile for that one. Nevertheless, I could not see that she accomplished much, and finding her idly jesting with Long Tom I advised her to come and work with me, declaring that she could thus make herself more useful.

"You shall rake," said I, "and I will toss; and you'll see how fast we'll get on."

To this the little wench agreed contentedly enough; and presently fell a-singing as she turned over the hay, though every now and then she would catch the great teeth of her rake in the ground, and call to me with a piteous voice to come and help her.

All at once—"Here's Sir Jocelyn," cried she, and, looking up, I saw him coming towards us from the house.

Mrs. Dorothy dropped her rake and went towards him, carrying herself like a Queen, for all her rustic attire. But indeed the very simplicity of it added to her beauty; the plain straw and unbleached linen seemed to gather the sunshine. I have never seen a creature so glowing with light and life as she seemed when moving across the grass to meet Sir Jocelyn. He stooped and kissed her hand, and after a moment's parley the two came back towards the centre of the field, laughing together.

And then Sir Jocelyn summoned me, and removing his coat and waistcoat desired me to set them in a shady place, and moreover to bring him a pitchfork. I ran with his garments to Patty, who laid them under the hedge,

while I returned with my pikel to Sir Jocelyn. There he stood, a fine figure of a man, in his cambric shirt, the laced cuffs of which he was turning up on arms nigh as muscular as my own ; but I must confess that these ruffles appeared to be somewhat out of place in a hayfield.

He seemed to read my thoughts, for he took the pikel from me with a whimsical look.

"One may be a man, my good Luke," said he, "in spite of being a Gentleman. Let us see if I cannot toss hay as well as the rest of you. Do you think I would consent to be the only neighbour of these parts who did not exert himself in Mrs. Ullathorne's service?"

And with that he fell to plying his pitchfork with as much zeal as though he intended to outdo us all.

Mrs. Dorothy remained talking to him for a little, and then, taking up her own rake, withdrew to another part of the field ; and presently Sir Jocelyn followed her, declaring that being a novice in the art of haymaking he must take his orders direct from her lips. She was not altogether pleased, but could not very well forbid his attendance, and continued to work by his side, though for the most part in silence.

A certain constraint, indeed, seemed to have come upon us all. The folks liked not to wag their tongues so freely as before, and were for the most part astonished and ill-satisfied at Sir Jocelyn's assiduity with regard to one whom they looked on as an equal. More than two hours passed, however, before he himself tired of his task ; and then, tossing away his fork and stretching himself, he spoke to Mrs. Ullathorne with a smile. She immediately summoned me, and informing me that Sir Jocelyn was thirsty requested me to run to the house and have a bowl of milk in readiness for him to drink ere he mounted his horse.

I obeyed, of course, and had reached the churchyard, by crossing which I meant to make a short cut to the house, before Sir Jocelyn and she had even left the field.

I was striding along between the cypress trees when I suddenly stopped short with a violent start. A man was standing with his back to me in a corner of the place—a corner which I was like to remember—with one hand passed through the bridle rein of Sir Jocelyn's horse, while the other, holding a stick, was engaged in turning over the heap of sodden grass which had for so many months lain undisturbed on a certain flat tombstone.

At the exclamation which I uttered Master Robert turned his head, and I observed that his face wore the same expression of sinister triumph as I had before noticed when he had deemed Sir Jocelyn in danger of his life. I knew his presence on such a spot boded no good to Mrs. Dorothy ; he was a man who could submit tamely enough to an injury, but would work with relentless cunning to avenge it. I had not spoken with him since the night when he had received chastisement at my hands as well as at those of Sir Jocelyn, and as our eyes met I saw not only that the shameful memory of that night was present to him, but seemed to detect the evil hope of paying off his debt in some unlooked-for fashion.

"Who goes there?" cried he, staring at me over his shoulder. "Luke Wright, I believe! A fine evening, Luke. I have made a curious discovery here."

"Have you indeed, Sir?" said I, striving to stay my hurried breathing, and to keep the terror which I felt out of my face.

"Why yes," said he. "'Tis a strange thing, Luke—somebody has been tampering with this tombstone."

"Tampering with the tombstone?" I echoed, and in spite of myself my face blanched.

"Aye indeed," he returned. "Why do you look so scared, Luke? Is not this news to you?"

"Eh," I returned, speaking gruffly to put him off, and struggling to regain my self-command, "eh, I should think I was scared. I don't like to hear talk o' folks meddling wi' tombstones. But why should you say such a thing, Master Bilsborough? I am sure yon old mossy stone looks just the same as any o' the others."

And in truth to my mind it did.

"There speaks ignorance!" returned he, with a cunning look. "You must know, my good friend, that I am well acquainted with the history of this stone, which indeed covers the remains of a Kinsman of mine, a certain William Bilsborough, who was at one time—a very long time ago, honest Luke—Sub-Prior in this monastery. You are aware of course that the place formerly belonged to a pack of Monks. Now this worthy Gentleman held high office amongst them and was apparently much esteemed, and for some reason or other, instead of being buried like the rest of his brethren, head to the chapel-wall—there was in ancient times a chapel here, you may remember—and feet to the path, his friends chose to turn his coffin t'other way round so that (as you may read in the epitaph) his eyes might even in death look towards the altar which in life he deemed himself unworthy to serve."

I could have knocked the fellow down for the sneer with which he repeated the words traced with such simple piety and good faith. Indeed I bore no ill-will towards the memory of these kindly old Monks, and I and all my family were very good friends with many folks of the same religion who had had much to suffer in recent times. In fact there was one Popish Squire in the neighbourhood

who used regularly to send his horses to my Father as often as a raid was made for them, and my Father used to keep them in safety until such time as the search was over.

But I had not much inclination to dwell on such thoughts now, for I perceived that Master Robert, who stood at what should have been the head of the grave, had scratched away a portion of the moss which had hitherto covered the inscription, and to this he now drew my attention.

"Here it stands, set forth plain enough, in fair Latin," said he, continuing to scrape at the letters. "*Hic jacet corpus Gulielmi Bilsborough*, and the rest. I could make it all clear to you had I time, and no doubt Mr. Formby could show you the copy of the inscription, which I have often read in the ancient register of this place, that he now has in keeping. It runs thus."

And Master Robert began to quote a string of Latin phrases, which had I had time I might have been able to construe for myself, for I had not been a scholar at Crosby Grammar School for so many years to no purpose; but being now somewhat flurried the sense might have escaped me had he not been officious enough to give me a translation.

"The epitaph may be roughly rendered thus: *Here lieth the body of William Bilsborough, faithful Companion of the Order, whose eyes, which he deemed unworthy in life to behold the Altar of God, now in death gaze without obstacle towards the Holy of Holies. May he rest in peace.*"

The malice on his face and the mockery of his tone again revolted me; but my indignation was overpowered by a greater fear.

"Well," said I, putting as brave a face on the matter

as I could, "'tis a good enough epitaph for a good man, and though his bodily eyes have long been dust, I dare say his spirit is now gratified with the sight of heavenly things. But how, Sir, if I may make so bold, do you argue from this writing that the tomb has been tampered with?"

"Why, very simply," said he. "The position of the stone has been reversed. This must have been done recently, for I vow 'tis not so long ago since I examined this place in company with Parson Formby, who drew my particular attention to its singularity."

If I had felt kindly enough towards the worthy Monks a few moments before, I must own I now heartily cursed the good men for the pious fancy which was like to have ill consequences for Mrs. Dorothy. And, indeed, in my anguish of mind, I freely blamed her also for having been so unwise as to select this particular grave as the depository of her secret, and above all for having omitted to replace the stone in its exact position. And then I blamed myself most of all for running away and leaving her to accomplish the deed with no better assistant than purblind old Malachi. No doubt her own eyes had been dim enough with tears, and then the moon had been at that time on the wane, but to be sure the stone was of the same size and thickness at either end, and so moss-grown that only those especially interested in the inscription would have taken note of its peculiarity. While these thoughts chased each other through my mind I stood and stared at Master Robert, unable for the life of me to find words wherewith to belittle his discovery; and as I was still cudgelling my brains, I heard Dorothy calling my name, and immediately afterwards Sir Jocelyn hailed his Kinsman.

"Cousin Robert! Cousin, I say—what do you there

with my horse? Are you philosophizing among the tombs?"

Master Robert went quickly towards him, dragging at the bridle of the horse, which was loth to leave the grass at which it had been nibbling, and I followed quickly. Mrs. Dorothy had been about to reprimand me for my delay in procuring refreshment for Sir Jocelyn, but at sight of my face the words died upon her lips, and I saw her eyes grow wide with fear.

"I may not be a philosopher, Cousin Jocelyn," said Master Bilsborough, "but I own to a healthy interest in all things strange and novel, and my curiosity has now been aroused by a somewhat odd circumstance."

Here Dorothy caught her breath involuntarily, and Sir Jocelyn immediately turning and observing her pallor quickly changed his tone.

"Well I, for one, pretend to no interest in your discoveries, Cousin Bilsborough; I think it was scarce seemly in you to pasture my horse among the graves."

Master Robert bit his lip, but immediately afterwards affected a laugh.

"Well, Sir Jocelyn, you must make excuses for a poor wretch when time hangs heavy on his hands. Your notion of five minutes, my dear Cousin—he! he!—you know you requested me to hold your horse for five minutes, but—he! he! I imagine I have been wandering about here for more than two hours."

"True!" rejoined Sir Jocelyn carelessly. "I forgot all about you."

"So I imagined. Oh, I make no complaint, I assure you, and I have been cogitating so deeply over the phenomenon yonder that I scarce wondered at your delay. Indeed I must tell you my tale, Cousin, and you will see if I have not cause for astonishment. On going to visit

the grave of my Kinsman yonder, I found to my amazement that the tombstone had turned round."

Sir Jocelyn, who had been listening impatiently, now wheeled towards him with an exclamation.

"Turned round! What folly!"

"Nay, but 'tis the truth!" cried Master Bilsborough eagerly. "You know the tomb of William Bilsborough, who had himself buried facing the east—well, I vow and declare somebody has been at the pains to reverse the tombstone completely, so that it now faces the other way."

I thought Dorothy would have fallen; I made a step towards her, but Sir Jocelyn was beforehand with me, and in a moment had flung his arm round her.

"Keep that tongue of yours quiet," he cried harshly to his Kinsman, "you frighten Mrs. Ullathorne with your foolish tales."

"No, no," cried Dorothy, disengaging herself. "At least I was frightened for a moment, for who could like to hear of such things? But I don't believe a syllable of the story."

"Nevertheless it is a fact, Madam," interrupted Master Bilsborough. "Cousin Gillibrand, you can bear me out, and so for that matter can other folks. William Bilsborough's tomb is well known in this place by all who pretend to antiquarian learning. You can see for yourself, Cousin Jocelyn, that it has been turned round. Whether good Brother Bilsborough did it himself for a frolic, or whether somebody else for some private reason removed and replaced it——"

He gazed meaningly at Mrs. Ullathorne, and again I saw her figure quiver and sway; but this time Sir Jocelyn did not turn his head, and she, to hide her trembling, leaned back against the cemetery-wall.

"I assure you," pursued Master Robert rapidly, "I am not speaking without book. I was attracted to the spot by observing that a heap of rubbish was piled upon my Kinsman's tomb, and going with pious intent to clear it away, I discovered——The lady is indisposed!"

Sir Jocelyn made a stride towards her, but, recovering herself, she waved him impatiently away.

"Oh!" she cried, "I cannot bear this hateful talk. What does he want? What is the man hinting at?"

"It matters very little," said Sir Jocelyn, with assumed lightness, though he eyed her narrowly. "My Kinsman is famous for discovering mares' nests. Content yourself, my good Robert, with the knowledge that you have distinguished yourself by frightening a young lady out of her senses, and that you have, as usual, meddled with what is no concern of yours. Pray, is it not time for you to go home and see whether the coat of arms over the gateway is not taking a swim in the fishpond, or whether the doorstep hath not climbed up to the granary, or whether, in short, the cat is not playing the fiddle and the dish running away with the spoon? Be off!" cried Sir Jocelyn in a terrible voice, and darting at his Kinsman one of the hawk glances before which he always quailed. "Be off, sirrah! and take care how your Wiseacreship comes poking and prying about these premises again!"

Master Robert slunk off without a word, and when he disappeared from view Sir Jocelyn turned towards Mrs. Dorothy.

"Though I dislike the tale-bearer," he said in a low voice, "I like the tale none the more. Can you read me the riddle, Madam?"

She clasped her hands and looked at him with eyes full of entreaty; and her lip quivered, but she did not answer. He sighed, and presently stooped and kissed

her hand, but with a troubled look, very different from the ardent and admiring one with which he had saluted her a few hours before.

"If it pains you to speak," he said, "I will not press you."

And with that he mounted his horse and rode away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WARNINGS AND A VENTURE.

I SLEPT but little that night, as may be imagined, and set forth at early dawn on the morrow with none of the joyousness of the previous day. I was oppressed with anxiety and harassed by a thousand doubts and fears ; underlying all was a feeling which I will not call distrust, but rather acute uneasiness, with regard to that secret of Mrs. Dorothy's, for which she chose so strange and sinister a hiding-place.

Notwithstanding my dislike of the growing intimacy between her and Sir Jocelyn, I was even tempted to wish that she would bestow on him at least some portion of her confidence ; he alone had the power, as he had also the will, to protect her, and might advise her in what I could not but think her present dangerous predicament. He alone exercised authority over his Cousin, who would not, or I was much mistaken, suffer the matter to rest there. Though he dared not openly betray his enmity, I felt convinced that he would employ all the artifice of which he was master to bring discredit on the woman for whose sake he had himself been treated with such contumely.

On arriving at Lychgate I found Mrs. Dorothy already afoot, wandering aimlessly about the meadow ; and at sight of me she began to ply her rake with fevered energy. Her face was pale and drawn with anxiety, and by the look of her eyes she, too, had not slept.

"Oh, Madam," cried I, breathlessly, and without pausing to greet her, "Madam, I feel that you are in danger. If you have aught that you are desirous of concealing would it not be well to place it in greater safety than at present?"

She gazed at me in terror, her face even paler than before.

"I cannot," she murmured, speaking with difficulty, for her lips were parched. "Oh, Luke, I could never go through it again. How do I know what might happen, and where—great Heavens! can I find a safe hiding-place? Oh no, I must trust to fate—and Sir Jocelyn," she added. "Sir Jocelyn will protect me. That man will never dare——"

"Not openly, perhaps," said I, sadly, "but snakes creep through the grass, Madam, and moles work underground," and with that I fell to work as diligently as I might, but without heart or spirit.

That my forebodings were not without foundation was presently proved by the fact that of all the cheerful workers who had come so willingly to our assistance yesterday but few returned to fulfil their promise of aid for to-day; and these looked morose and sullen, avoiding speech with Mrs. Ullathorne and glancing at her askance. From this I judged that Master Robert's influence was already at work, and that he had lost no time in arousing the suspicions of the credulous village folk.

One could scarce believe the scene to be the same as that which had witnessed the blithe labours of yesterday. The workpeople attached to the place, and their few assistants, raked and tossed the hay in silence when Dorothy was near, and muttered to each other, with gloomy looks, in her absence; and though she plied them with refreshments as before, they ate apparently

without appetite or enjoyment, and it was noticeable that no man would go nigh the house for so much as a draught of water, and that Dorothy's women, when forced to go thither by her command, made a wide circuit, so as to avoid passing the graveyard, and even then returned with scared faces and short breathing.

The day was extremely close and sultry ; a kind of thick vapour hung about the heavy foliage of the trees, and the lowering sky wore that coppery tinge which betokens coming storm.

By six o'clock, however, the work was concluded and the hay secured in cocks. Mrs. Dorothy, who had still kept her pretty gracious manner in spite of the trouble which was upon her, thanked them many times for their kind and neighbourly help, and asked them if they would not partake of a syllabub at parting, which she had just caused to be made, and which would refresh and invigorate them after their long and tedious labours.

Seeing that the folks hesitated, she added quickly :—

“ If you will walk quietly to the gate, I will have it served to you there ”.

They agreed to this willingly ; and presently she and I between us carried out a great crock full, and her maids followed with bowls into which we ladled the rich foaming stuff.

The poor girl had said that she trusted to Fate, and Fate, to her often unkind, chose this very moment to play her a scurvy trick. For while the neighbours stood about the lychgate, peaceably drinking, there came of a sudden that awful rumbling of wheels and trampling of invisible feet which betokened the advent of the Ghost Coach. There was a moment's hushed silence, and then a scene of such tumult as I can never describe. The mugs and their contents were cast upon the ground, and

folks fled hither and thither screaming ; and some called upon Heaven to protect them, and some cursed Mrs. Dorothy for her dealings with evil spirits, and declared that she must surely be in league with the devil ; and louder than all the din they made came the steady tramping of feet that left no trace behind, the continuous roll of the advancing wheels. I caught Dorothy by the arm as she stood transfixed with terror, and though my own limbs trembled under me, I hurried her swiftly to the house. But there, as I thrust her within the door and was for leaving her, she clung to me piteously as she had done once before, and besought me to remain with her.

"Nay," I returned, "I must go back and parley with them, else perhaps they'll be for doing you a mischief."

"Oh," cried she, "I fear not flesh and blood—but this awful nameless terror ——"

I broke from her, however, cursing the chance which had kept Patty at home that day to do some baking for my Mother ; for her little, warm, live presence would have brought as much comfort I doubt to that distracted soul as my own sturdy self.

The crowd was already dispersed when I got back, having taken advantage of the momentary lull, when the ghostly procession paused before the Cross, to fly in the contrary direction ; and I spoke to the few stragglers as cheerfully as I could, reminding them of what ancient date was this strange Visitation, and how harmless in its nature. But in the midst of my harangue the noise began again, and the folks, who had indeed scarce heeded my talk, fled like the others, leaving me to await with blanched face and chattering teeth the advent of the dreadful cavalcade.

One terror succeeded another that night ; for no sooner had the funeral train ceased to walk, than such a storm

burst upon the land as I do not remember ever to have witnessed. The very heavens seemed to crack, and the clouds to spit forth lightning as forked and venomous as fiery snakes, which appeared in the sky in a dozen places at once ; the crashing thunder was awful enough to make man and beast alike quake as they hearkened ; many indeed were struck, and the great elm in Mrs. Dorothy's meadow, beneath which we had feasted so gaily on the previous day, was riven from top to bottom. When the rain fell it was with such overwhelming might and density that much damage was done to the standing crops, and the floods subsequently rising laid waste many a cornfield and meadow, and likewise drowned numbers of sheep and lambs.

Instead of regarding this general misfortune as a visitation of Providence, many of the country people were foolish enough to think it the work of hapless Mrs. Dorothy.

"Do you mind," said they one to another, "how she held back the storm till her own hay was safe? Aye, and her corn stands high and dry. But because her wicked practices were suspected—and must she not indeed be in league with Old Horny if she actually tampers with dead men's graves?—she must needs vent her malice on us all."

For nigh upon a week not even her own workpeople ventured to go nigh her, but at last they came straggling back, for her pay was good and work not so plentiful that it could be despised. Moreover, as they said, the days were long enough and light enough for them to go and come without terror of the darkness, and after all no harm had as yet befallen them. I doubt not that each was provided with some potent charm—the breast-bone of a goose or a pierced stone, or such-like—which

enabled them to set at naught the machinations of the Evil One.

The poor girl herself kept close within doors for a full se'nnight, at the end of which time, the floods having subsided, and matters having more or less returned to their normal course, she came once more to visit my Father. I could not help feeling great curiosity about her first meeting with Sir Jocelyn, who had, for his part, continued to appear regularly at the customary hour, and was good enough, in Mrs. Ullathorne's absence, himself to read the paper aloud.

She was very pale when my Mother led her in, and I noticed that her breath came quickly as she greeted Sir Jocelyn, and that she seemed ill at ease.

But he on his part was all anxiety to reassure her, and made himself more than ordinarily pleasant to carry off the constraint and awkwardness of the situation.

Thus, when my Father somewhat reproachfully told her that she was a great stranger, he asked him gaily whether he would have the lady to take boat or balloon in order to visit him, declaring that till then the roads had been impassable to a female either on horseback or afoot.

A further diversion was presently caused by the entrance of Mrs. Penny, big with a message from her Ladyship, which, however, Sir Jocelyn would not allow her to deliver, but made an imperious sign to her to sit down. She accordingly took a place beside Patty on the window-seat, and Mrs. Ullathorne, who had scarcely raised her eyes from the page, continued to read.

My Father was indeed much interested, for that issue of the *Daily Courant* contained important tidings of different kinds ; giving the text of the Act of Neutrality, signed on the thirty-first day of the previous March ; secondly, the Declaration of King Augustus of Poland, and further—

a thing of which my Father always took particular note—the list of Her Majesty's ships which had recently come into port and those which sailed westward.

At the conclusion of this paragraph Mrs. Dugden, who had been fidgeting, as the saying goes, like a hen on a hot griddle, could contain herself no longer, and with a hasty greeting to my Father burst out:—

“Oh, if you please, Cousin Jocelyn, do me the favour of letting me carry home that paper immediately, for I assure you her Ladyship has missed it, and is much displeased. She has invited Mr. Formby to step up this evening on purpose to acquaint him with the news. And, indeed, I believe Doctor Bradley——”

“Oh, if Doctor Bradley be coming, no wonder you are in a flutter, Cousin Penny,” returned Sir Jocelyn laughing. “Take back the News paper by all means, and be sure you read the advertisements together. I see here set forth an announcement of ‘The famous Royal Essence—for the Hair of the Head and Periwigs, which is not only the best preserver of Hair in the world, keeping that of Periwigs in the curl and all Hair from fading, but by its Incomparable Perfume it strengthens the Brain, revives the Spirits, quickens the Memory, but never raises the Vapours in Ladies’. Let him see that, my good Penny, and you will soon call forth Doctor Fanny's ire, for he will think this hairdresser trespasses on his particular preserves.”

“Indeed,” said Mrs. Penny with a titter, “I often divert myself by showing these advertisements to Doctor Bradley, and he is not always angry, I assure you, Cousin Jocelyn—on the contrary, he sometimes laughs heartily. He asked me the other day, when I pointed out to him an advertisement of the ‘Angelic Cough Tincture,’ how it came by such a name. ‘For,’ said he, ‘I was never

before aware that the angels were accustomed to catch cold.' Now was not that a droll speech, Cousin Jocelyn?"

Here Mrs. Penny broke off to laugh, but immediately continued, for when her Ladyship was not there to keep her in order Mrs. Penny dearly loved to babble, and this time she assumed a more serious expression.

"You must know I consider Doctor Fanny quite justified in condemning the greater part of these advertisements, for he tells me much evil comes from them. For instance, he informs me that many an innocent babe which dies of convulsions in teething, might be saved if an apothecary were called in to lance its gums, 'instead of which,' says he, 'the foolish parents think to cure it by hanging an *Infallible Necklace* round its neck, which of course,' says he, 'is the merest quackery and can do no manner of good to the unfortunate infant'. 'Then again,' said he, 'these lotteries about which such a deal of pernicious nonsense is talked, do they not bring ruin and destruction on many an honest home, by arousing a gambling spirit in those who had before no propensity to such a vice, by driving many a miserable wretch to drink, who——'"

"Ah," said Sir Jocelyn, interrupting her without ceremony, "I fear it would take even a greater Wiseacre than Doctor Fanny Bradley to put a stop to the rage for lotteries. The country is going mad over the great one at Guildhall, which gives a million and a half in prizes."

Mrs. Penny was casting up her eyes and hands in preparation for the delivery of a further instalment of second-hand sagacity, when her Cousin recalled her to more practical matters by holding out the News paper.

"There, you had better make haste back with this," said he, "or her Ladyship will chafe at the delay. Be sure you do not forget to show the advertisements to Doctor Bradley."

Then, as Mrs. Penny blushed, he added with an arch look :—

“ I vow Doctor Fanny’s name is as good as the *Britannic Beautifier* to you, Cousin Penny, for it makes you bloom like a rose. I think you like Doctor Fanny very well, my dear, and I am sure that he, for his part——”

“ Oh, la, Sir Jocelyn, pray, pray do not say such things ! Whatever would my Lady think if she heard you ? ” and clutching the News paper with a startled look the poor lady hurried from the room.

“ Now there,” said Sir Jocelyn, looking after her, “ goes one who by all the laws of God and man should be Doctor Fanny’s mate. I protest the two were made for each other, for while she thinks the good, dull man a paragon of virtue and wisdom, he considers her the pink of feminine perfection, aye, and I dare swear, finds a thousand beauties in her faded face. I came upon ’em a few days ago in the garden—but ’tis not fair to tell tales out of school, and nothing is more certain than that they will never make a match of it for fear of incurring the displeasure of my Lady Mother. It is marvellous what follies folks will commit for lack of a little moral courage. Doctor Bradley is a man of independent means who could well afford to keep a Wife, yet will he never speak, and all because of a little sharp-tongued old woman ! ”

During this harangue Sir Jocelyn had alternately addressed himself to my Father and Mrs. Ullathorne, but while the former had evinced concurrence in the sentiments expressed by sundry clackings of the tongue and inarticulate murmurs, the lady had scarcely shown signs of attending to, much less appreciating, them.

Thereupon Sir Jocelyn addressed her directly.

“ Pray, Madam, do you not agree with me ? ”

She gave a great start.

"I don't know—I beg your pardon—my thoughts were wandering elsewhere."

"So I perceive," said he, quite good-humouredly. "Of what were you thinking, Mrs. Ullathorne?"

"Did I not hear you say just now," asked she, "that an immense sum of money—a million and a half, I think you said—was to be given in prizes at some public lottery?"

"The great State Lottery, Madam," said he; and then, smiling and raising his eyebrows, "What have we here, a gambler?"

"I would fain make money," she replied almost sullenly, while the colour rushed over her face.

"Nay, my dear," said my Father earnestly, "leave these matters alone. No woman gained any good by meddling wi' such like. Sure you're comfortable enough as you are now, and like to be more so wi' such a face to your fortune."

And here he winked and looked extremely knowing. But Mrs. Dorothy paid no heed to him.

"I would I knew particulars," said she. "I would give anything to have a ticket. Is it too late to procure one now, I wonder?"

"Why, the drawings are being made every day," said Sir Jocelyn, gazing at her sharply. "I know not if it would be possible to obtain one. Perhaps some enterprising person might be persuaded to retail one at a high premium, if one was on the spot in town."

"Oh, I long to have one," cried she, "and I would willingly pay the fee and run the risk—but alas! I know not how to set about it. And how can I make inquiries from this place? The whole affair would doubtless be at an end by the time my letter reached, even if I knew whom to write to."

"Madam," said Sir Jocelyn rising, "your wish is a command. I will myself post to London this very night and inquire what may be done in the matter."

"Eh, dear! well to be sure!" cried my Father, "did ever a body hear the like?"

Dorothy was looking earnestly at Sir Jocelyn; her face was very pale.

"Even for the gratification of my wish I would not put you to so much trouble," said she falteringly, yet with a certain wistfulness in her tone.

"Never think of that," cried he lightly. "I will, if it please you, go shares in the venture and stand to rise or fall with you. The ticket shall belong to both of us. If we win, my journey will not have been in vain; if we lose I shall still have my reward."

"What reward?" queried she quickly.

"The knowledge of having tried to please you," said he, and then he added in a lower tone, gazing at her the while as though he would fain read her very soul, "the consciousness that you placed at least a partial trust in me. Ah, if I had but your entire confidence!"

I think by this time both had forgotten the presence of so many homely listeners, for she looked back at him as though pained, yet with defiance too, and answered in a low voice:—

"That will I give to no man in the world".

But both were all at once recalled to a sense of their surroundings by my Father exclaiming in a scandalized tone:—

"Tut, tut, my dear, what folly is this! Won't trust Sir Jocelyn, won't ye? Indeed you should know better, for he is as kind and honourable a gentleman as any in the whole of Lancashire."

"To that I heartily agree," said she, with one of her

sudden bright smiles. "And I am about to prove my faith in him by letting him make this venture for me. I think we shall win," she added in an altered voice. "I should be lucky at such hazards." And here she sighed, and Sir Jocelyn, with a sudden keen glance, inquired why she made the prophecy so dolefully.

"Because," said she, "I am so unlucky in other ways."

His face clouded over then, and, after a moment's silence, he bade us farewell, saying he must make instant preparations for his journey.

"I shouldn't wonder," said my Father, when Mrs. Dorothy also had departed, "I shouldn't wonder if, after Sir Jocelyn's return, we all heard a bit o' news—gradely news."

As I forbore to ask its nature my Father, to make his meaning clear, began to hum, much out of tune, but to the best of his ability, the air of "Haste to the Wedding".

CHAPTER XIX.

A SEARCH FOR ARMS AND A DISCOVERY.

I WAS riding home one evening about the middle of August, proceeding very quietly, for the weather was close, so that poor Chestnut was in a lather after the first mile, when, just at the cross-roads by Withy Woods, I caught sight of a female figure running quickly towards me.

By its small size and the colour of the dress I knew it at once to be Patty's, and pressed forward with a beating heart to meet her, for her appearance so far from home at this hour boded no good.

And, indeed, the little wench lifted a face of such distress as she caught my bridle rein that my fears were confirmed; she had run so fast that she could scarce speak, and her eyes seemed ready to start from her head.

"Oh, Luke," she gasped, "Luke! Make haste to Lychgate—I know not what is to do! News came half an hour ago that a party of soldiers was there making a search for arms, or some such things. Malachi sent a little lad to tell Dorothy, who was reading to my Father, and nothing would serve her but to run thither at once."

"What?" cried I, affrighted. "Do you mean to say she hazarded herself among the soldiers? Why, they'll perhaps want to carry her off to prison."

"Oh, I know not what they want," groaned Patty. "My Father would have kept her back by force, I believe,

could he have got on his legs, but she would hearken to naught he said, and set off running as fast as she could. So, knowing Sir Jocelyn was not at home—which is a great misfortune, Luke, for I am sure he would have stood by her—I despatched the same lad to Parson Formby's, so that he at least might take her part and assure the folks that she is no Papist but a good Churchwoman. And the boy made such speed that he passed me on the road a quarter of an hour ago, and told me that Parson Formby and Doctor Bradley, who was playing Tick-tack with him in the porch, had started up in such haste at the news that they upset the board, and had called for their horses at once to proceed to Lychgate—and then I ran hither as quickly as I could to meet thee, Luke."

"Thou art the best little lass in the world!" cried I. "I couldn't have planned better myself. But I must not delay another instant. As a lawyer," cried I, feeling for the first time some pride in the title, "as a lawyer I may be able to prove to the Officer his mistake."

And with that, turning Chestnut's head towards Lychgate, I put him to the gallop; and we arrived at the place just as Mr. Formby and Doctor Bradley were dismounting. A little crowd was gathered in the yard, in the midst of which I distinguished the red coats and shining musket barrels of the soldiers; besides which Mrs. Ullathorne's workpeople were all assembled, together with a variety of idlers who had hastened to the spot.

Summoning a lad I knew, I flung my reins to him, and, the Parson and Doctor having already tied up their nags, which indeed were well enough accustomed to stand, we all three pushed our way to the front.

The first object which met my view was Dorothy herself in parley with a young gentleman who seemed to be the Officer in Command. I observed that she was deadly

pale, and that her eyes shone with a feverish brightness, but that otherwise—from sheer desperation, I suppose—she appeared calm and collected enough.

“Surely, Sir,” she was saying as we approached, “you have now satisfied yourself, after the minute and diligent investigation which you have just concluded, that my poor house contains nothing which ’tis unlawful to possess. I wonder, indeed,” said she, “why you should have thought it necessary to search for arms on the premises of a lonely female like myself.”

“Ah, Madam,” said the Officer with a mixture of gallantry and severity, “it is well known that your sex is not always a stranger to nefarious practices. Sometimes youth and beauty serve to cloak very sinister designs.”

He was a pretty young fellow to whom, I judged, authority was new enough to render the exercise of it agreeable; yet, though he spoke in a loud and commanding voice, and seemed desirous of impressing Mrs. Dorothy alike with his own importance and with the gravity of her situation, I could not but think him struck by her attitude, (which had, if I may so express it, a kind of piteous dignity), and with her extreme beauty.

“I regret to say,” he continued, “that I am not yet satisfied. I have been credibly informed of certain suspicious circumstances which may possibly render your residence a source of danger to the State. It is therefore my duty to leave *no stone unturned* in the prosecution of my search.”

He uttered the last phrase with such significant emphasis as to leave no doubt of his meaning, either in the mind of Mrs. Dorothy or in my own. She could not repress a start, and her very lips became bloodless.

At that moment, however, Mr. Formby, who, always

slow of speech and of action, had till then remained silent, stepped forward, urged by a vigorous dig in the ribs from Doctor Fanny, and saluting the Officer began to speak in Mrs. Ullathorne's defence.

"I assure you, Sir," said he, "I have known this young woman since her arrival here; she is a most estimable member of my congregation, alike regular in her attendance at church and virtuous in her life and habits. I cannot conceive what information you can have received which should induce you to suppose her other than a peaceable, law-abiding, modest young female, and, in consequence, worthy of all consideration."

"Indeed, Sir," put in Doctor Fanny, "I must endorse Mr. Formby's words. I too have the honour of knowing Mrs. Dorothy Ullathorne pretty well, and not only do I consider her physically incapable of using fire-arms, but of such a high-strung constitution as to render the possession or concealment of such highly prejudicial to her health."

"'Tis false," cried a voice from the crowd, "for she has been known to declare that she goes armed day and night."

I looked hastily round at this, and being taller than most of those who stood about me, caught sight of a man skulking in the rear of the little crowd, whom I recognised as one of Sir Jocelyn's servants—a fellow much in favour with Master Robert Bilborough—and immediately the conviction flashed upon me: he was doubtless here to report to that gentleman the progress of affairs. From the moment that the Officer had declared his resolve to leave *no stone unturned*, I knew that the preliminary search had been a mere formality, and that its real object was the opening of Brother William Bilborough's grave, and the consequent rifling of hapless Dorothy's secret. I had

no difficulty at all therefore in identifying the Officer's informant.

Dorothy carried herself well, however, though I knew the strain must be well-nigh unbearable. At sound of the last words she raised her head and let her eyes sweep contemptuously over the multitude of faces, in most of which she could read neither friendship nor pity.

"I do indeed go armed," she cried, "but it is to defend myself. Do I not well to be distrustful when I live among such folks? What harm have I ever done you that you should be so eager for my downfall? Still, if it be your pleasure, Sir," she added, turning to the Lieutenant, "to leave me at their mercy, you are welcome to take possession of my only weapon."

And with that she drew from her pocket a little silver-mounted pistol—a very toy, which must have carried a bullet not much larger I doubt than a peppercorn. The Officer took it from her hand and smiled; then, with a low bow, he returned it to her.

"Nay, Madam," said he. "This does not appear to me very dangerous, and I will not confiscate it. I am extremely sorry to cause you so much distress and inconvenience, and will therefore conclude my investigation as quickly as possible, that you may be relieved of our presence. We have already gone over the house and stables, I have but to make a survey of the Churchyard, and then——"

"The Churchyard!" she echoed, with a faint cry. "Oh, Sir, surely, surely, you might leave the dead in peace! Will you not accept my solemn word—my oath, if need be—that you could find nothing there to justify your suspicions?"

"Why so anxious, Madam?" returned he, sharply, and I saw that what I must needs call the lust of discovery

was upon him—that curious hunter’s instinct which makes men pursue, and not infrequently destroy, a quarry guiltless of all save the capacity for eluding their vigilance. “If you are so sure that nothing unlawful is harboured yonder, from what cause proceeds your alarm?”

She did not answer, but made a blind rush towards the gate of the cemetery, against which she threw herself, as though to bar with her own person the advance of the intruders. The Lieutenant, however, signed to his men to climb the wall; and as they scrambled over it, he, himself, approached her, and this time with some appearance of irritation.

“I must really beg you, Madam,” he said, “to suffer me to pass, or I shall be constrained to remove you by force.”

Then, unwilling that any stranger should lay hands upon her, I, myself, rushed forward and drew her out of the way.

No sooner had the Lieutenant entered the Churchyard than I saw that my forebodings were indeed but too well founded, for he immediately directed a searching glance towards the resting-place of Brother William Bilsborough, if indeed I may thus term that which had been already once disturbed, and seemed like that day to be profaned afresh. And seeing Mrs. Dorothy nigh to fainting, and the rough folks crowding round the gate, I could not forbear beseeching the Officer to have some regard for the lady’s feelings, and to conduct the inquiry with as much privacy as was possible.

The Parson and the Doctor, who had followed the Officer into the enclosure, endorsed my petition, and the Lieutenant gave a hasty command to his men, a small number of whom, marching back through the gate, turned their attention to the crowd, and by a few judicious taps

with the butt ends of their muskets, and an intimation that prods with the bayonet would be like to follow, quickly dispersed it, though some more adventurous than the rest remained in the vicinity.

Continuing his original tactics, the Officer conducted a perfunctory search in all sorts of unlikely places; examining the cedar trees, turning over the loose stones at the further end of the place, looking behind a few of the upright headstones; but it was not long before he paused beside Brother William's grave.

"Why, here," said he, "is a stone that appears to me to fit ill in its place—the earth, moreover, round about it seems to have been recently disturbed."

Now I swear that neither of these statements was true; for Dorothy and Malachi had taken such precautions that, were it not for the fatal mistake detected by Master Robert, it would have been impossible to discover that the stone had ever been removed.

Mrs. Ullathorne, who had been leaning on my arm now broke from me and again flinging herself across the gate cried out, in an agonized voice, that they would find nothing there, and that they should beware of profaning the homes of the dead.

But, never heeding her, the Lieutenant gave orders for a spade and pick to be brought, and before long—for the men worked with a will—the poor grave yawned for the second time and the Officer, leaning forward, gazed down into the pit.

"Ha!" said he, "what do I see? A chest! Of very modern make, too. I'll swear this is no fourteenth-century coffin. Haul it up, lads, and let's have a look of its contents."

With a scream that rent the very air, Dorothy fell over in a dead faint, and what with my fears on her account,

and my dread of the supernatural—indeed, all this time I had been expecting a repetition of those awful and unearthly cries which had already once frozen the marrow of my bones—and the awe with which I awaited the impending discovery, my own brain seemed to reel, and I had scarce strength to uplift her in my arms. I averted my face and stood quaking, for I durst not look upon the box, though my ears, painfully alert, heard the scraping of its sides against those of the grave, and the pattering of falling earth as the men drew it up, and then the blows of the pick and the wrench of the splintered wood as they broke it open. Then came the Lieutenant's voice :—

“Bones, by all that's unholy !”

And Doctor Fanny's :—

“A male skeleton, I should say. Yes, I think it is complete, though it has been dismembered. Let me examine the skull—certainly the skull of a man.”

I verily think I, myself, should have swooned, so great was my horror and amazement, if at that moment a well-known voice had not fallen on my ear, and by momentarily diverting my thoughts enabled me to recover myself. A strong hand was laid upon my shoulder, and Sir Jocelyn's face, terrible with grief and anger, glared down at mine, which was, I doubt not, dazed enough to reveal my plight.

“Dolt !” he cried, “you had well-nigh dropped your precious burden. Give her to me ! Is this how you guard her during my absence ?”

Now I had thought Sir Jocelyn in London, and was amazed at this sudden return, which seemed to add one more marvel to the many strange events of the day.

He took the inanimate form from my arms, lifting it as easily as he might have lifted that of a child, and went

striding into the enclosure, where he hailed the Officer sternly.

"What do you here, Sir? Rifling graves—desecrating the bones of the dead?"

The young man turned round with a great start and bowed obsequiously, and with a crimsoning face, for the Gentlemen of the neighbouring garrison had a great respect for Sir Jocelyn, who had often handsomely entertained them. Had it not been for his hospitality, indeed, their life in the provincial town would have been dull enough.

"I—I must crave pardon, Sir," said he, "for having trespassed upon your property during your absence; but I was informed this was likely to be of long duration. And duty, Sir Jocelyn, as you are aware, must not be unduly procrastinated. A hint from a reliable quarter gave me to understand that a parcel of arms was concealed in this place, and, taking into consideration a certain mystery which seems to surround this lady, I deemed myself bound to prosecute an immediate search."

"And your zeal," cried Sir Jocelyn, "did not even respect the dead. Well, Sir, are you much the gainer? You have violated a good man's grave, and you have found what it is customary to find in graves—bones. You have also terrified an innocent lady into loss of consciousness, and possibly danger to her life. Is not that enough for you? Surely it now becomes your duty to replace those desecrated remains in their resting-place, and rid your victim of your presence as soon as possible."

Sir Jocelyn's flashing eye and the scorn and fury of his tone roused the young man's ire, and he responded hotly enough.

"Though we have not discovered that of which we came in search, Sir Jocelyn, the matter cannot be dis-

missed so lightly. This chest is no coffin, but a recently constructed packing-case ; the skeleton it contains is not that of the Monk whose name is inscribed on the tomb, but of a man that, as Doctor Bradley estimates, has not been dead a very great number of years——”

“I should say,” put in Doctor Bradley, in his judicial manner, “about nine or ten years.”

“The lady’s extreme alarm,” resumed the Officer, “and extraordinary emotion, taken in conjunction with this mysterious discovery, arouses very grave suspicions in my mind.”

“What !” cried Sir Jocelyn, “you believe her a murderess, do you? Why, Grimsby, I know you to be a gallant man, aye, and gifted with penetration, too. Look at this lovely creature, and tell me if that face be the face of a murderess.”

At Sir Jocelyn’s first words, Lieutenant Grimsby drew himself up, simpering, and he now gazed at the hapless Dorothy with an expression at once compassionate and admiring. Indeed the sight of that unconscious face, so helpless and so pitiful, and as white as any sheet, would have touched a heart of stone.

“She is not yet twenty,” pursued Sir Jocelyn, following up his advantage, “and, according to Doctor Bradley, the remains are those of a man who has been dead about ten years. At what age, then, would you have had her commit the crime of which you suspect her? You have terrified her, I say—what gentle lady would not be terrified at the opening of a grave? If there be a mystery, let us not seek to penetrate it. Come, Grimsby,” he added in a softer tone, “you are too good a fellow to cause this fair creature further pain and distress. Restore that poor human wreck to its resting-place, and call away your men. I tell you frankly you will be doing me a favour—I take

a more than common interest in Mrs. Ullathorne. A time may come, Jack, when you might be sorry to have affronted and injured one with whom I hope you may be on as good terms of friendship as with myself—I swear there is no woman I honour more.”

Mr. Grimsby’s face changed its expression many times during this harangue, and at last assumed a look at once knowing and elated, he being, I suppose, highly flattered by Sir Jocelyn’s confidence.

With a meaning smile he now assured him that he might count upon him.

“Get the business over as speedily as possible, then, my dear friend,” said Sir Jocelyn, “and hark ye, Jack ; I can count on your discretion, I know, but do me the favour to march your lads as quick as may be out of this place, so that they have no chance of blabbing to the rustics here of what they have seen.”

“They shall depart speedily, my good Sir,” said the other.

“Run quickly to the house,” said Sir Jocelyn, turning to me, “and procure some water : this swoon has lasted over long. Doctor Bradley, will you follow me within doors ? Mrs. Ullathorne is in need of your ministrations—Mr. Formby, I know I can trust you to see that these poor relics are returned to the earth as reverently as may be.”

He spoke these latter words in a low voice, and the Parson, who had been standing within the gate, a silent and melancholy spectator of the scene, now roused himself from what seemed to be a painful reverie, and hastened towards the grave ; and there, whether intentionally or unconsciously, began to repeat aloud the sacred words ordained for the burial of the dead. As I turned to leave the place, his solemn voice fell upon my ear, “In

the midst of life we are in death." . . . And then this prayer : " Yet, O Lord God, most Holy, most Mighty, O Holy and most Merciful Saviour, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death." . . . And again : " Thou knowest, O Lord, the secrets of our hearts." . . .

And I thought within myself that if Mrs. Dorothy could have heard the good man she would have been comforted ; and I, myself, felt grateful for the benison which had hallowed a scene that had otherwise been frightful, and made in some manner recompense to the hapless remains which had been so indecently exposed.

Who knows? thought I to myself, the devout act of that worthy man has belike averted the anger of the other sleepers in that place.

Then my fear seemed to leave me, and the last sounds I heard on entering the house were the Parson's reverent tones : " Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust ; in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life."

CHAPTER XX.

SIR JOCELYN SPEAKS OUT.

WHEN I carried the water to the oak parlour, Dorothy Ullathorne lay extended on the settle, still without any sign of returning consciousness. Sir Jocelyn stood by her in deep concern, but Doctor Fanny, I think, was more occupied with recent events than with her actual condition.

"The strangest thing I ever witnessed in my life!" he was saying as I entered. "'Tis my belief, Sir Jocelyn, that the man, whoever he may have been, died not in his bed. The bones were whitened as though by exposure to the weather. There hath been foul play somewhere."

"For God's sake, Doctor!" cried Sir Jocelyn irritably, "have done with such charnel-house talk, and attend to your patient; 'tis time she came round. Bring hither the water, Luke."

As I approached, Doctor Bradley, who, recalled by his patron's words to a sense of his duty, had cut the lace of Mrs. Dorothy's bodice, suddenly uttered an exclamation.

"Why, what have we here? Od's bobs! what a fine trinket!"

He drew forth from the folds of her tucker the amulet mentioned by Patty, and, not being a man of great nicety of feeling, proceeded to examine it.

"A curl of hair, by Jingo! And here's an inscription at the back: 1709 *Et*—what is it again? These words

are scratched by some unskilful hand, though the date is engraved. *Et semper*—that's it! 1709. *Et semper*. 'Pon my word!"

Now Sir Jocelyn's blood was at all times hot enough, and I had often seen him angry, but never to my knowledge had his face worn such a look as that which he now turned upon the Doctor. His voice, too, was scarce articulate as he broke out:—

"Oh, shame, shame! Great Heavens! must all sanctities be violated this day? Doctor, I took you for a man of honour—but to pry into the poor girl's secrets while she lies helpless under your hands! Oh, Sir, out upon you!"

The Doctor dropped the amulet and stared at him blankly, and Sir Jocelyn, still in a frenzy of rage, took him by the shoulders and pushed him towards the door.

"Begone!" he cried. "She will be better without you."

Poor Doctor Bradley, much amazed and apparently uncertain as to the precise nature of his offence, withdrew without further protest, and Sir Jocelyn returning took up the trinket, and with the most gentle and reverent hands in the world restored it to its lurking-place, a spasm of pain crossing his face the while, but caused more, I truly believe, by the same impulse of generous anger as that which provoked Doctor Bradley's dismissal, than from jealousy of the rival whose token lay so near Mrs. Dorothy's heart.

Meanwhile I had been dashing water on her face and chafing her hands, and Sir Jocelyn, perceiving my ministrations, was pleased to commend them, saying in a gentle voice: "Yes, we shall bring her round between us. It is better so—better that she should be left to our care. We two at least love her."

And though the terrors of the preceding hours and the strangeness of the secret which had been brought to light had well-nigh caused a revulsion of feeling in my heart—for I was unable to disentangle Mrs. Ullathorne's share in this mystery—all my old faith and devotion returned at these words, and I was in a moment ready to die in her defence.

Presently, with a great sigh, she opened her eyes, gazing upon us at first blankly, then with a look of anguish and alarm ; and Sir Jocelyn hastened to reassure her.

"Have no fear, Madam," he said, with such a note of tenderness in his voice as I had not thought its masterful tones capable of being attuned to. "Have no fear, there is no one here, no one at all except your poor servants, your devoted servants who love you."

As she raised herself on her elbow and gazed from one to the other, still piteously, a loud voice was heard without—Mr. Grimsby's voice shouting out orders to his men, and then came the rapid tramp of marching feet, proceeding, as he had promised, in quick time. Mrs. Dorothy fell back, almost swooning again, and Sir Jocelyn, with the same earnestness, assured her they were gone—quite gone—and that she would never be troubled by such a visitation again.

"As for your secret, dear lady," he added, "let it remain as before, unguessed at. The relics," he added hesitatingly, "about which you are so much concerned, have been restored to their place, and will henceforth rest undisturbed. Raise your head, dear Madam, and think no more on what has passed."

"Oh!" she cried, with an accent of such despair as pierced our very hearts, "how can I ever look up again? How am I hunted—shamed!"

"Not shamed, love," said he, and heedless of my presence he fell on his knees beside her, "never use such a word in connection with yourself. There is one man, at least, who honours you with all his heart and soul. Oh, my sweet, you are not fit to live alone—I cannot have you any longer tossed about this rough world. Give me the right to protect you. Put your hand in mine and say you will be my Wife."

I was so taken by surprise that I stood and stared, hardly able to breathe in my excitement. Had he forgotten his rival, I wondered? Did his impetuous passion drive from his thoughts the love token which he had but just now handled, and which nestled in his Mistress's bosom—did he attach no meaning to the words writ, no doubt, by her own hand—*Et semper*?

He had seized upon this hand and pressed it in a kind of ecstasy of pleading, first to his lips and then to his heart; and presently she drew it away, not in wrath but rather with a kind of compassion.

"Oh no, Sir!" she cried, "no, never—never! Indeed you know not what you ask. I am not fit to be your Wife or that of any honest man. There is a stain upon my hand, Sir Jocelyn—oh, if you knew my history you would shrink from me!"

She looked at him timidly, expecting, as I did, to see him start to his feet and hurriedly leave her; and indeed I scarce credited my ears, though on first coming amongst us Mrs. Dorothy had dropped a hint of some such painful matter to my Mother. It had not, however, served to shake my trust in her, and now though she sought to condemn herself by her own words I could not credit them. But Sir Jocelyn! The proudest man in England—the most punctilious on all points of honour—how would he receive such a confession?

He remained at his post, and after a moment's silence again captured her hand.

"My dear, I think you do not know what you are saying. But in any case, to me this little hand is the fairest and the most spotless in the world. If indeed," said Sir Jocelyn, in that strange new voice of his, while the whole of his strong frame shook with emotion, "if indeed, my sweet love, some wrong has been done to you in the past, the more reason why you should have protection now. Let me gather you up and take you into my heart and into my home. And I swear that my whole life shall be devoted to your well-being and your happiness."

That she was touched I could not doubt; the generosity of this noble and honourable man, the strength of his love, the deep feeling which betrayed itself in his whole aspect, were so moving that tears stood in my own eyes.

There was silence for a full minute, and then she jerked her hand away.

"Never!" she cried, "never! I will be no man's Wife. Sir Jocelyn, I cannot find words to thank you—" and here her voice trembled—"but even if my resolution were not fixed, I could never marry you—you have come too late."

Unconsciously her hand strayed toward her bosom, caressing my Master's token, as though the contact gave strength to her resolve.

Sir Jocelyn rose then and stood for a moment looking down at her.

"There is some one else whom you love," said he, and his voice was as gentle as ever, though it had become husky.

"There is one whom I love with all my heart and soul," she returned. "You have crossed swords with him, Sir, and you have seen what he is."

She spoke with an accent of pride which must have been hard for Sir Jocelyn to bear.

"My whole love is his," she repeated, "yet will I never wed him—I will bring no disgrace on an honourable house."

He regarded her for a moment, his face working, and suddenly aged and haggard.

"Oh!" he cried, "it is not to be borne. You pass sentence on yourself though heaven and earth alike cry out against it. Hath this man then no mercy in his soul——"

"He——" interrupted she, almost fiercely—"he knows more than you, Sir Jocelyn, and it is not by his will that I have come to this resolve. Many a time has he besought me—even with tears—to set it aside and consent to be his. But my own heart must be judge, and I will abide by its decree."

"Tush!" broke out Sir Jocelyn impatiently, "but why does *he* abide by it? You might desire me a thousand times to go away, yet I vow I would never leave you. My love is greater than his, I say. Were it not for him I believe I could break down your opposition. Such a passion as mine must in time carry all before it. But with his image ever between us——"

He interrupted himself and walked to the window, where he stood gazing out for a little space, and presently returned, addressing her with an altered look.

"I had well-nigh forgotten," said he, "the business for which I sought you out this afternoon, Mrs. Ullathorne. I thought to find you at The Delf as usual, but instead I was greeted with news of your distress. Well, all that is past and done with; you need fear no repetition of the outrage. And meanwhile I have brought you good news. I have brought you a lottery ticket,

Madam, a benefit ticket, moreover, so that we stand a good chance of bettering our fortunes; and I have arranged with a qualified person to keep watch for us and give us immediate tidings of success or failure. So there," said he lightly, "is a pleasant thought for you to cogitate upon."

She thanked him with a pretty wan smile, being in fact too much exhausted in body and bewildered in mind to feel the satisfaction he hoped for; and I noted that while she faltered grateful words her eyes sought his face half-fearfully, as though wondering what emotions were disguised by its assumed composure, and whether in fact he had accepted his dismissal as a final one. And he looked back with a half-smile as who should say, "Madam, you shall not raise the mask".

But presently, when he took his leave, I thought he pressed his lips to her hand with as much fervour as ever before, and I noted that Mrs. Dorothy flushed and drew her fingers quickly away.

CHAPTER XXI.

LADY GILLIBRAND CONDUCTS AN INQUIRY.

SHORTLY before noon on the following morning, when I had been seated for some time at my desk, feeling, it must be owned, little enough inclined for office work, and being indeed alike shaken in nerve and heavy in spirit, a great clatter sounded all at once in the street without, and a coach and six drew up with a flourish just outside my Uncle's door. Immediate investigation through the slit in the blind enabled me to identify the Gillibrand liveries; and almost before the resounding peal at the bell, which at once ensued, had ceased, I saw John the footman lowering the steps which her Ladyship presently descended. The next to alight was Master Robert, whose countenance wore, I thought, an expression of sinister satisfaction, while Mrs. Penny, who came tripping after them, looked so much alarmed that I concluded that some important and possibly unpleasant business had brought about Lady Gillibrand's visit to her Lawyer.

My Uncle, in some trepidation, rose from his seat, and coming forward with an ingratiating bow gave her Ladyship an obsequious welcome, and desired me to set chairs.

Having done so, I was about to retire when Lady Gillibrand made an imperious sign to me to step forward.

"My business is not with you to-day, Waring," said she. "Sit down and have the goodness to attend to your own affairs while I speak to this young man, your

Nephew. I prefer to discourse with you here, Luke Wright," said she, "because I believe you are not to be found at home until the evening, when, as I have been informed, Sir Jocelyn is now accustomed to visit The Delf." She paused, darting a penetrating glance at me.

"His Honour, Sir Jocelyn," said I, "has indeed been so good as to visit my Father often since his accident; his discourse much raises the poor man's spirits, and we all take it as a very great favour, my Lady."

She threw back her head with a kind of snort, and observed sneeringly to Mrs. Penny that those were new times indeed, when Sir Jocelyn took pleasure in visiting the sick, and that Farmer Forshaw must be a very attractive person. And then she turned to me again.

"Pray, Luke Wright," said she imperiously, "give me some account of what occurred yesterday at Lychgate. I have heard such strange tales of a search for arms, and that girl, Dorothy Ullathorne, being found with some actually upon her, and of an opened grave, and a chest and a skeleton, that I vow I know not to what I can give credence."

"Sure, Madam," said I, "half of them are idle stories and do not lose by the telling. I can myself bear witness that the pistol found upon Mrs. Ullathorne was but a little toy fit for a child to play with, yet, being so lonely in that place, it gives her some comfort to imagine that she could, if needs were, defend herself with it."

"Ha!" cried her Ladyship, who had appeared to attend to but the first part of my answer, "you can bear witness, can you? I was rightly informed then that you were there. Pray, what is this business of the grave, and of the tombstone being turned the other way? What can have been the young woman's object in turning it upside down?"

"Indeed, my Lady," said I, "I know naught about it. I stood outside the Churchyard all the time and did not approach the grave you mention—I thought it very ill done of the soldiers to meddle wi' it."

"Somebody else had meddled first with it, though," said her Ladyship, with one of her piercing looks. "Is it not the case, Waring, that William Bilborough, a Popish Monk allied to our house, had himself buried in a contrary fashion to the rest of his brethren, and that his tombstone, until recently, gave testimony of the fact?"

"Oh! that weary tombstone," thought I; but here to my relief my Uncle, who had been longing to put in his oar, began to relate similar cases which he had known of such strange practices in former times; in particular pointing out that an ancestress of Sir Jocelyn's, a certain Madam Gillibrand of Elizabeth's time, caused her coffin to be placed upright in the family vault so that she might continue even after death to gaze towards Ferneby.

"And this is an absolute fact," said he, "for she left this behest in writing, and I have myself deciphered it, when Sir Jocelyn's noble Father, the late honoured Sir George, would have me examine some of the deeds in the great safe at the Hall. And moreover it is not uncommon——"

"That will do, Waring, that will do!" cried my Lady impatiently. "Go back to your corner again and have done with your prating. Now, Luke, see if you can find your tongue; if you were but half as ready of speech as that talkative Uncle of yours it would be better for all of us. You saw not the contents of the grave, you say?"

"No, my Lady," said I; and then, thinking to be very clever, I added:—

"But if you please, my Lady, Mr. Formby and Doctor

Francis Bradley were there, and I am sure could give your Ladyship any information you are in need of".

"Pooh!" she retorted irritably, "Mr. Formby, good man, has no voice for anything but psalms and sermons; and as for Doctor Bradley——"

Here I saw Mrs. Penny start, as though pricked by a pin.

"He is the dullest man," said her Ladyship with emphasis. "I verily believe he sees no further than the end of his own great nose."

"Oh pray, your Ladyship!" interposed Mrs. Penny, and then stopped short, blushing at her own temerity.

"Oh pray, Mrs. Penny!" cried her Ladyship, mimicking her. "Pray, is not his nose a great one? Would you have me say, I beg, that Doctor Bradley's nose is very small? I am sorry I cannot call it a button to please you. Pray, have you anything else to say on the subject, Cousin Penny?"

"Oh no, indeed, Cousin," responded the poor lady feebly. "I only thought—it only seemed to me—I could not help being hurt in my feelings, Cousin Gillibrand, at the way you spoke of worthy Doctor Bradley's nose."

"Penelope!" said Lady Gillibrand sternly, "I blush for you!"

Leaning back in her chair she fixed the hapless Mrs. Dugden with a stony gaze, beneath which the poor creature winced and drooped, finally raising her handkerchief to her face to conceal her confusion.

"I am glad to see you hide your face, Cousin Penelope," said her Ladyship severely. "I am glad to see symptoms of a returning sense of decorum. Heavens!" cried my Lady, raising her eyes, "is there such a thing as female delicacy left in the world?—I begin to fear not.

However, to return to the point at issue—though I discoursed Doctor Bradley this morning for an hour by the clock, yet could I not obtain from him any reliable information.”

I inferred from this that though Doctor Fanny had shown some want of discretion on the previous day, he was now atoning for it by a praiseworthy degree of caution in other ways.

“Therefore,” resumed Lady Gillibrand, “as you are the only other witness on whose testimony I can depend, I should be much obliged to you, Wright, if you would narrate to me exactly what occurred.”

“Yes,” put in Master Robert with a sneer. “It will be interesting to hear Luke’s account. He hath a glib tongue on occasion. Come, Luke, let us hear thy tale.”

I turned my back on him, for the sneer on his face vexed me beyond measure, and addressed myself pointedly to her Ladyship.

“Why, my Lady,” said I, “I don’t know that I can tell you much. The search was half over by the time I got to the place, but I heard the Officer say he had been through the house and stables and found naught; and there was a lot of folks about——”

“I am told,” said Lady Gillibrand carelessly, “that my Son, Sir Jocelyn, was there.”

At this point, though I took care not to turn my head, I took note that Master Robert was drumming on the table after a fashion that, had his Patroness been less preoccupied, had earned for him a sharp reprimand.

“Yes, Madam,” I returned, with as innocent an air as I could assume, “his Honour Sir Jocelyn did indeed come up, but the affair was pretty nigh over then, and——”

“And can it be true,” interrupted my Lady, pouncing

upon me as if to take me unawares, "that Sir Jocelyn carried that woman Ullathorne into the house himself?"

"Well, indeed, Madam," said I, "the poor young lady was in a dead faint, and I was for holding her. But being in a sore fright myself—not liking this business at the grave, my Lady—I very nigh dropped her, and Sir Jocelyn, coming up at that moment, caught her as she was on the point of falling, my Lady. And then he and Doctor Bradley took her into the house and brought her round, my Lady. And I do not think I can tell you anything more."

"A strange tale," said her Ladyship, after staring at me for a moment, while the colour mounted slowly in her wrinkled face.

"Strange indeed," cried Master Bilsborough, "and like to have a strange ending."

Lady Gillibrand whisked round in great wrath.

"Pray," said she, "what mean you by that, Cousin Bilsborough?"

"Nothing, Madam, nothing," returned he, cringing. "This fancy of my Cousin's for this dark proud Witch seems to me vastly curious."

"Witch!" echoed her Ladyship.

"Did I say Witch," returned he with a small smile to himself. "Well, in truth, does not her conduct lend itself to the interpretation of Witchcraft? Who could have thought that Cousin Jocelyn would be so taken with such a creature? I swear he is a very Slave to the girl."

"Slave!" cried her Ladyship, with ever-increasing sharpness. "Your choice of language is somewhat ill-advised to-day, Cousin Bilsborough."

"Well then, I'll be mute," said he, shrugging his shoulders. "'Tis my belief the girl is a Witch, and whether

or no my Cousin Jocelyn is her Slave will be made plain in time, I suppose. But," he added, half to himself, "I would we were done with the business."

He had spoken with more assurance than I had ever known him use where her Ladyship was concerned, and his persistency seemed to impress her, for, instead of chattering him as might have been expected, she gazed at him a moment in silence, and then exclaimed, with a mixture of wrath and anguish—"Would, indeed, that we were done with it! Would that some one would rid us of the creature for good and all!"

She spoke no doubt without evil intention, yet I could not but note the curious impression on Master Robert's face as he rose to follow her; for Lady Gillibrand was now on her feet, and, after pausing to reprimand my Uncle for using so fine a quality of snuff, and to inform him that he ought to content himself with common Spanish, at two shillings the pound, she marched out of the place, followed by her two adherents.

A straw will sometimes show which way the wind blows, and this visit of her Ladyship's indicated, I thought, some uncommon disturbance at Ferneby Hall. I had already been asking myself whether Sir Jocelyn would not identify and punish the author of the attack on Mrs. Ullathorne, and I had often wondered how it fared with Master Robert.

On reaching home I found my suspicions confirmed; the womenfolk met me on the doorstep, eager to relate how James Brewster, one of the servants at the Hall, had been summarily dismissed by Sir Jocelyn, and how there had been words between his Honour and Master Robert, though whether on that account or no was not yet known; but 'twas thought likely, said Patty. Mrs. Margery, her Ladyship's woman, with whom she, Patty, had some ac-

quaintance, had come down to The Delf in tears, for James was her Spark, and had declared it to be monstrous unjust in Sir Jocelyn to break with him thus.

"He has no fault that I know of," said she, "save that he is attached to Master Bilborough."

"And then she told us," said Patty, "that his Honour and Master Bilborough had high words last night, and this morning too, insomuch that her Ladyship interfered. And his Honour said to his Mother quite loud, so that Mrs. Margery could hear him in the passage, 'Well then, for this time only, Madam, since it is your wish. For I warn my Cousin that should I find cause for offence in him again, I will have no mercy upon him.'"

"I think it must have been about that fellow James," chimed in my Mother. "He is an idle lad with never a good word for any one—I'm sure I can't think what Master Bilborough sees in him that he should make such a to-do. But it seems Sir Jocelyn said this morning when he paid him his wage and sent him about his business, that it should be worth no man's while to do Master Robert's dirty work."

"And he is gone home to his folks at the smithy," cried Patty, taking up the ball. "And eh, Luke, he tells such tales o' poor Dorothy as never was! 'Tis a shame, I declare! He will have it she's a Witch, and says I don't know what all about her doin's in the Churchyard. He says she meddles with the graves and that she brought a lot o' fresh bones there. Yes, he has the impudence to say he saw them. He was looking over the wall, he says, and saw the soldiers dig 'em up."

"Hush, Patty!" cried I indignantly. "Have done with such talk. How can you find it in your heart to carry such wicked tales? I was there, as thou knows, and I swear I saw no bones. And Sir Jocelyn was there, and

I heard him tell the officer myself that there was no woman he honoured more than Mrs. Dorothy. So when you hear liars and scandalmongers talking ill of that poor girl, just you stop their mouths with that."

Now this was scarce prudent of me, and to set such a tale afloat was like to do Dorothy more harm in the long run by rousing her Ladyship's anger and the village folk's jealousy, than the slanders of Master Robert and his tool ; but I was in such a heat of indignation that I did not pause to reflect on the consequences of what I said.

Upon this Patty jumped up and clapped her hands ; and, my Mother going indoors to prepare supper, she plied me with a variety of questions and I could not forbear answering some of them. I had shown more discretion on the previous night when I managed to satisfy the folks at home with a very bald outline of the affair at Lychgate : how the search had been made and naught had been found, and how the soldiers had been marched away again. But now, since Patty knew so much, I deemed it no harm to tell her some more ; but, of course, I swore her to secrecy. And I found it pleasant enough to linger thus in the twilight and watch her eager face and hear her wise talk. She was a very sensible little lass, and though I did not concur in her opinion that Sir Jocelyn would conquer Dorothy in the end, I quite agreed with much that she said.

My Father was now beginning to hobble from one room to another on crutches ; though not so helpless as before he had become more irritable, for kind neighbours were not lacking to carry tales to him, how his affairs suffered from his inaction, how poor his crops were looking for want of proper weeding, how his men spent half their time at the ale-house, and how indeed

the younger ones were discovered at times playing on reed pipes which they had made for themselves, and dancing, instead of attending to their business. Then the poor man would get into a great rage, and would ask Johnny fretfully why he did not make haste and grow up so that he might see to things, or else he would reproach Patty for not being a lad, and declare that unless there was some one to gaffer them his folks would always be idle.

I often caught him looking wistfully at me in those days, and once he astonished me by blurting out :—

“D—— it, man, why wasn’t thou my Son instead of that addle-pated Simon Wright’s? ’Tis thy Mother’s fault, as would go shilly-shallying till I served her out by marrying Patty’s poor Mother. Eh dear ! if thou’d ha’ been a Forshaw, Luke, thou’d be my right hand now. Thou’d al’ays a good notion o’ farm work, and thou’s just of an age. Thou did ought by rights to be my Son, for ’twas I kept company wi’ thy Mother first. But no— she couldn’t make up her mind, forsooth, and so thou art a Wright, Luke, an’ thou canst make thyself’ naught else.”

“I’m sure, Sir,” said I, “I’d ha’ been your Son if I could, an’ you’re just same as a real Father to me. Couldn’t ye make shift to——”

“Couldn’t I make shift to what?” roared he, thumping the floor with his crutch. “I couldn’t make shift to do naught else but leave my shoes for my own Son to step into. There mun be a Forshaw at The Delf, and you, Lawyer Wright, mun stick to your desk. I wonder at you,” said my Father sternly, “I wonder how you can have the impudence to vex me wi’ such talk. What’s settled, settled, and there’s an end on’t !”

When he was in such a mood as this every slight disappointment was made a grievance of ; and he was

therefore highly incensed because for some days after the abortive search for arms, Mrs. Ullathorne failed to pay her customary visit. Indeed he grumbled so much that my Mother sent Patty privately to acquaint Dorothy of the fact, and to beseech her to come and sit with him as usual.

Sir Jocelyn meanwhile continued to visit my Father at his habitual hour, and was good enough to read to him as before, in the absence of the Mistress of Lychgate; and he was not slow to sympathize with my Father's indignation, and even, I thought, to foment it.

I think Mrs. Ullathorne had not looked to find him there when, on the day following Patty's embassy, she arrived at The Delf; she was pale and seemed weary, and the sight of Sir Jocelyn threw her into such confusion as I had never before beheld.

He, however, did not appear in the least disconcerted, but saluted her as usual, and sat down again, crossing his legs and preparing himself to listen to the reading with as much composure as though nothing remarkable had happened since they last met in that place.

My Father was immensely delighted to see his visitor, and bade her welcome with so much warmth that it called up a faint smile to her face.

"Why didn't ye come before, eh?" called he, patting her slender hand with his great one.

And then I know not what freak took her, but she suddenly raised her face, over which the colour rushed, and cried out:—

"Why, to speak truth, Mr. Forshaw, I was ashamed to come under this kindly decent roof of yours. Have you not heard how they have used me? And they are saying such things—oh! it drives me mad! I heard only this morning that there is a tale going about the

village of the sorceries I practise yonder. Surely you would not care to receive visits from a Witch?"

"A Witch indeed!" murmured Sir Jocelyn under his breath, and he darted a look at her from beneath his black brows, to the full as ardent as any a one he had hitherto cast at her.

But my Father's indignation at her story was great.

"Well! well!" groaned he, clacking his tongue, "what won't these 'ere leather-headed folks say next? A Witch, to be sure! Well, that's a tale! Why don't some of 'em prick ye? I reckon they'd find some good red blood come out fast enough. Dear o' me! I wish this leg o' mine 'ud mend up a bit quicker and I'd let some of 'em know what I thought!"

"I shall be cutting my wheat next week," said she, "and Malachi tells me we shall find it hard to induce reapers to work for me. Even my own folks are dropping off one by one."

"Let not that trouble you, Madam," said Sir Jocelyn, "I will look into the matter myself, and will send my men down to gather in your crop for you. 'Tis a splendid crop," said he, with a smile, "and you should do well by it. It ought to make a good beginning to that fortune which you are so anxious to secure."

He spoke laughingly, but she turned upon him sharply, crying out that if she were so anxious to make money it was not for love of gain, but rather the thought of old debts that weighed upon her heavily.

Now I was astonished that she should make such an admission, the more so because it evidently escaped her in her eagerness to justify herself in Sir Jocelyn's opinion; a sign of the times which I noted with some misgivings on my Master's behalf, for hitherto she had seemed to care little what Sir Jocelyn or any of us

thought of her ; and indeed this independent attitude had often given me offence.

She was conscious of her own mistake in a minute, and immediately seizing upon the News paper began to read as though to prevent any possible rejoinder from Sir Jocelyn, who, whatever he may have thought, betrayed no surprise or emotion, and appeared to devote his whole attention to the news of the day.

CHAPTER XXII.

A PARAGRAPH IN *THE POSTBOY*.

IN the following week Mrs. Ullathorne duly cut her wheat ; Sir Jocelyn, according to his promise, sending his own men to reap and bind it. But few of the labourers hitherto employed at Lychgate came with any regularity, though the womenfolk continued to work for her, whether because they were more grasping than their Sons and Husbands, or because closer contact with their young Mistress had caused them to realise that she harboured no sinister designs against them or any human creature.

This harvesting of the great field was nevertheless a dismal affair, shorn of all the jovial ceremonial which usually attended such occasions. No neighbours were there to assist with strong arm and kind advice ; even the poor folks came not to song, as they called it ; though as a rule the ears dropped by the reapers were gathered up with joyous alacrity, and there was usually a little feast made for the gleaners, and sometimes there was even a piper to play to them, and then, having gathered all they could and danced till they were weary, they went home carrying their songles in triumph. But in Dorothy's field many ears of wheat would have lain unheeded in the stubble had not she herself gleaned after the harvesters with Malachi and our Patty, who happened to be there that day.

"See what a Miser it is," grumbled Sir Jocelyn's men

as they watched her at work. They spoke loud enough for her and Patty to hear them, and, indeed, little Patty herself wondered that her friend should show such eagerness in the matter, until, drawing her aside, Dorothy told her that she was toiling for the benefit of the poor.

"I am determined," said she, "that they shall have their part, else how could I look for the crop to be blessed? Since they will not glean for themselves I am doing it for them, and I will send the bundles privately to Mr. Formby so that he may distribute them as he thinks fit, not letting it be known, however, that they come from me, lest they should be thrown back on my hands."

It was towards the end of August that Sir Jocelyn came down somewhat later than usual to The Delf one evening, and burst into the parlour waving a paper in his hand.

Dorothy had been sitting like the rest of us, awaiting his arrival with the *Daily Courant*, and started up as he approached her.

"Good news, Madam!" he cried excitedly. "An express has just arrived from town informing me that our venture has been crowned with success. Our ticket, Madam, has come up a prize, and we are now the joint possessors of a benefit worth one hundred pounds a year! Ha!—what say you to that, friend Forshaw? Will you grumble against lotteries again? Fifty pounds a year each! Why, 'twill keep me in canes and periwigs, and I daresay Mrs. Ullathorne's share will satisfy her mantua maker."

"Fifty pounds a year!" cried Dorothy, clasping her hands, "'tis a fortune. 'Twould be enough to keep me in comfort even without help from the farm. This is indeed news, Sir Jocelyn. How shall I thank you for the trouble you have taken!"

She extended her hand to him before us all, and he bowed over it, saying in a low voice—not so low though but I heard him: “Do not thank me at all; it is a mockery. Is not all I have at your feet if you would but stoop to take it?”

Then in a moment he stood erect again and was joking with my Father.

Though Mrs. Dorothy’s face darkened at this speech of his, it soon became evident that she could think of nothing but his tidings. She was by turns excited and abstracted, now talking eagerly of all she would do with her fifty pounds, anon sinking into a reverie, her brows knit, her lips moving as though occupied with some difficult calculations.

When Sir Jocelyn would have escorted her home she dismissed him with more curtness than she had shown him of late, announcing that she had a matter of business to discuss with me, and requesting my company in his stead.

Sir Jocelyn stepped back with a smile; and, seizing my hat, I walked forth beside her.

“Luke,” said she, when we had left the house behind and found ourselves in the open fields, “Luke, can you call to mind how much money there is of mine still remaining in your Uncle’s hands?”

“Why, you have drawn out a good bit of it from time to time,” said I, and then I fell to reckoning. “I think you have a little over a hundred pounds remaining,” I summed up in conclusion.

“Yes; I thought so too,” returned she. “I have been trying to add up the figures, but ’tis not easy to cipher in one’s head. Now, Luke, I want you to get that money from Mr. Waring to-morrow.”

“What! All of it?” I cried aghast.

"Yes ; all of it. I want to spend a hundred pounds at once, and 'twould not be worth his while to guard the remainder."

"I hope you are doing right," said I, assuming an air of wisdom. "'Tis a very great sum, and you might be in more need of it some day than at present. Your crops might fail or——"

"Ah, but my fifty pounds a year secures me from want," cried she. "I dared not run risks before, but now I am safe, whatever happens."

"Wait, at least, till you have the fifty pounds in hand," cried I. "I have no great trust in these lotteries—you might find yourself defrauded in the end."

"No, no," returned she, "I cannot wait a day. Oh, Luke, this obligation is like a millstone round my neck ! Day and night I have thought and planned how I should rid myself of the burden, and now this chance has come I will at least discharge some of it. I will give you a note to take to your Uncle, and if you will kindly bring me back the money to-morrow night I shall be infinitely obliged to you."

"My Uncle will strongly disapprove," said I with a sigh. "He will have a thousand reasons to urge against it. What must I say if he questions me ?"

"Why, nothing, save that you know naught of the matter and are merely obeying orders. I will make the note so imperative that he cannot hesitate in complying."

When we reached Lychgate, therefore, I accompanied her into the parlour, and sat there waiting for her letter, which she dashed off at great speed, and with a deal of underlining, which I presumed denoted emphasis.

I went away sorely puzzled and disapproving of the measure almost as much as did my Uncle when I presented the missive to him on the following day.

I told no one but Patty of my mission ; the little wench, indeed, was so urgent to ascertain Mrs. Dorothy's motive for desiring my company, that I found it impossible to withstand her. I sometimes wished I had not already confided so much to her, for she would now never rest until by hook or by crook she had wormed out of me everything that I knew. She would lie in wait until she found me alone, and then so contrive that, what between questions and surmises, she had drawn from me all that could be revealed. Had it not been that I knew her to be trustworthy, my conscience would have pricked me sore many a time ; but she was staunch and faithful and, moreover, often very helpful in putting off our elders when they pressed me with questions.

I wished for her aid indeed with my Uncle next day, I know, for the worthy man so badgered me as nigh to drive me distracted.

At last, losing patience, I cried, " Well, Sir, 'tis Mrs. Ullathorne's own money, and if you will not give it up to her she will perhaps think you have made an unfair use of it ".

" Fiddle-de-dee ! " cried Mr. Waring, " a pretty thing to say to your Uncle, young Master."

And with that he embarked on a sermon which exhausted both himself and me ; but in the end unlocked the safe, counted out the notes and handed them over to me.

Dorothy thanked me for the service I had done her with such joyful gratitude, however, that I well-nigh forgot the vexation it had caused me.

The next thing we heard was that Malachi had gone on a journey. Dorothy told us herself, and, moreover, asked permission to sleep at our house during his absence.

We were all much gratified at this mark of friendliness, but when we were alone together Patty whispered in my ear, "He has gone to pay some of those debts, Luke".

And I nodded back, and we both of us felt, I daresay, very important at knowing so much more than our neighbours.

We thought no further on the matter, however, until some days later, when Sir Jocelyn in handing the News paper as usual to Dorothy—it was the *Postboy* that day I remember—pointed out with a laugh a certain paragraph which he said would set many tongues a-wagging.

She began to read it aloud with a smiling face, but suddenly stopped short with a gasp, till seeing our eyes fixed upon her, and Sir Jocelyn asking her anxiously if she were not well, she continued the passage hastily and with many blunders.

It was dated from Exeter, and related in plain terms how much interest and excitement had been awakened in that town by a strange event which had recently occurred there.

"His Lordship the Bishop," said the paper, "while taking the air in the Palace gardens on Tuesday evening, was suddenly accosted by a tall man in a grey frock who thrust a letter into his Lordship's hand, saying hurriedly at the same time that it contained payment of an old obligation. Before the Prelate had time to question the fellow he disappeared. He looked and spoke like a countryman, and the Bishop, though he could not distinguish his features in the dusk, is convinced that he never set eyes on him before. The packet, on being opened, contained bank notes amounting to one hundred pounds sterling. His Lordship declares himself quite at a loss to account for this strange benefaction, being, it is

said, unconscious of having either lent the sum in question to any individual or been defrauded of that amount. It has been suggested, by some of the townspeople, that it may possibly be an act of restitution made by some dishonest person in whom the pangs of conscience have tardily made themselves felt. But we are credibly informed that the Bishop himself scouts the notion, and declares that none of his family could have done him such a wrong without arousing his suspicions, and that as for robbery from the outside, he had suffered this but once in his life, when his coach was stopped on the border of Exmoor and rifled of plate and other valuables. It is said that his Lordship, feeling himself unable to accept what he chooses to consider a mistaken offering, and having made vain search for the donor, intends to distribute this strange benefaction in charity."

"And very well done of his Lordship, too," said my Father approvingly.

"Shall we not have the war news?" asked Dorothy, in an odd, constrained tone.

"Ah, to be sure, my dear, and thank you kindly. Jest a minute—but this 'ere tale is a queer thing. What do you think, your Honour? Was the money really owing to his Lordship?"

"Why, how can I tell?" returned Sir Jocelyn laughing. "'Tis strange that he should have no recollection of it. Perhaps 'tis an offering from one whom he had befriended in former times, or there may be some folks wicked enough to think that 'tis the harvest of some wild oats of his youth—a lost bet or a gambling debt, or what not. He must be a fortunate man if he was never defrauded to his knowledge except on the highway—and I doubt the Gentlemen of the Road are not so eager to discharge their debts of honour—but I am sure you are not well, Madam," he

added, turning suddenly to Dorothy, who did indeed look unlike herself.

"A momentary dizziness," said she. "The room is close, I think. I will go out into the air for a few minutes. No, I do not want any one to accompany me," she cried impatiently, as more than one of us started up. "I am better by myself."

We saw her, through the window, pacing up and down the flagged path, and Patty and I looked at each other.

"It was that phrase 'debt of honour,'" said Sir Jocelyn suddenly, "I should not perhaps have used it. Did she not say that she herself had debts which weighed upon her?"

Presently Dorothy came back, and taking up the paper accomplished her task as usual, giving no further sign of discomposure.

But after supper I joined Patty in the buttery, where she was ranging the dishes, and asked her in a whisper if she thought it possible that Mrs. Dorothy could have sent that hundred pounds, which she had been so eager to secure, to the Bishop of Exeter.

"The paper said: '*A tall man in a grey frock,*'" she whispered back. "Malachi is little and bent, and wears black always. Do ye think it could be that other gentleman, Luke?"

"Nay," I returned, "they said he looked and spoke like a countryman. Besides, how could Dorothy owe the Bishop anything?"

"Perhaps his Honour, Sir Jocelyn, was right," said Patty, "and 'twas just what he said about an honourable debt or a debt of honour or some such thing that upset her. Do you know sometimes I wonder, Luke—thou'lt be mad if I say what I'm thinking on——"

"Say it all the same," said I.

"Dorothy is as clever as she is beautiful," said Patty, "but sometimes I wonder, Luke, if——"

Here she set down the dish which she had been wiping, and, turning and leaning towards me, tapped her forehead mysteriously.

"Do you mean to hint she is not right in her head?" whispered I, as angrily as she had expected.

"Not quite that," she returned earnestly. "But she's had a deal o' trouble—eh, 'tis plain to be seen she has. And I sometimes think she fancies things. That talk of hers at times, thou knows—that talk about not being fit to be our friend—a child could see how good she is, so I reckon 'tis a bit o' fancy makes her keep it up. And then these debts o' hers. How could she have debts when she lives so quiet and ne'er sees a soul! I often wonder if 'tis all a notion."

I stared at Patty; sometimes she gave evidence of a kind of shrewdness which I could not help respecting in her. I had heard of such things before now, as of people being sane on all points save one, and for a moment I almost wondered if Patty could be right, and if all this weight of anxiety and anguish existed but in Dorothy's imagination. But when I came to think more seriously of the strange facts concerning her which had already come to light, of the mystery which surrounded her, of her unexplained relations with that handsome and noble gentleman whom I chose to call my Master, I could not agree with Patty's theory.

"There is more behind," said I, "than we can ever guess at. There is a riddle which I fancy we shall never read."

Malachi came back in course of time and Dorothy returned to Lychgate.

As our own harvest-time came on my Father began to

get about more, and would sometimes drive himself from field to field in the spring cart, with his leg propped on a stool.

The readings ceased about this time, for, as Mrs. Ullathorne said, he was now not so much in need of consolation, and, moreover, owing to her difficulty in getting folks to work for her, she was kept busy at home. She had induced her women to undertake much of the lighter field work, such as weeding and feeding the live things; the milking, of course, they did entirely. This left a larger share of dairy work to the Mistress, and her plea was therefore justified, though I fancy she was not sorry to withdraw herself as much as might be from Sir Jocelyn's society. The daily meetings and conversations at The Delf, the subsequent walks home attended by his Honour, had of late become evidently irksome to her.

My Father frequently regretted her prolonged absence, and was, moreover, much concerned at the strained relations between herself and her folks.

"She'll not be able to work the farm if this goes on," he would say. "They tell me she has but one lad there now besides old Malachi. Who's to do the potato gettin' and the ploughin' an' that? 'Tis a serious business. She'll have to give up the farm if it goes on."

"Nay," said my Mother, who was an optimist, "'tis all that stupid talk o' James Brewster's. But 'twill die away in time; the neighbours must see what a harmless wench it is, and how good-natured and kind. And our own friends 'ull haply take a leaf from our book and hold out a hand to her, poor lass. We must have her at the Breaking, mustn't we, Gaffer?—maybe when they see how thick we are wi' her they'll think better on't."

Now our great Breaking of Flax took place about the middle of September in each year, and was always the

occasion of a jovial gathering. Many of our neighbours came to help us, and our big barn was filled with them. We made the place very gay with garlands, and in the evening we had a fiddler and a piper, and kept up sports and dancing till daybreak.

It would be, as my Mother said, a good opportunity to show our friends in what high esteem we held Mrs. Dorothy. My Father was much respected by all who knew him, and his opinion and that of my Mother could not fail to carry weight. I bethought me also that when they saw the beautiful creature working like the rest of us, taking her turn at the gigs, or helping to gather up the beaten flax, they could not but be touched at her simplicity and kindness. I had noted that when she worked with us in the meadow all who were there seemed more friendly to her; and I hoped that her presence in our midst would lay their suspicions to rest. Something of this I said to her when I carried my Mother's invitation, and, though I well knew she had little heart at this time for seeing company, she suffered herself to be persuaded and promised to join our homely gathering.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OUR GREAT BREAKING OF FLAX.

THIS year we had an especially great Breaking for there was a deal of flax, and nearly forty persons were kept busy breaking and thrashing it. My Father's two gigs were tended by four of our own folks, while it was one man's work alone to take up the flax as it came out from between the rollers. There being only two gigs much of the stuff was thrashed by hand—swingled, we called it—the lads beating it with slats of wood. 'Twas a pretty sight and a busy one, what with the whirring of the gigs, and the noise made by the swinglers, and the folks all talking together. All the lasses had decked themselves with flowers, and the great pile of beaten flax rose ever higher and higher, and looked as if it were on fire as the sunshine came pouring in through the open door; and the dust of it flew all about the place like specks of gold, and powdered our hair and our clothes.

Midway in the afternoon we heard a sudden tumult of voices and laughter, and the squeaking of a fiddle and the drone of pipes, and there was Richard Tatlock and a fiddler and a parcel of Disguisers, and a whole crowd of lads and lasses and idlers; and the Morris Dancers straightway began their merry antics to divert us, and all our folks crowded round, and, between them, there was such a din no one could hear himself speak.

I mind Dorothy stood just within the doorway, her

face flushed, for she had been working with the rest of us, and her beautiful hair was dusted all over with the powder from the flax and glittered like a crown of gold, and she was laughing, and looked as I would have had her look oftener—as young and blithe as she was bonny. A little child was clinging to her skirts in some alarm at the Mummers, and she perceiving it lifted it in her arms, striving with gay and pleasant words to soothe its terrors. It was but a sickly babe, and had been brought thither by its Mother, who was one of our scutchers, and had hitherto stood by her side while she worked; but during the bustle and outcry following on the arrival of Tatlock and his crew, had been separated from her. I thought I had never seen so pretty a picture as the two made—even the pinched face of the little one seemed to show off the glow of life and strength in Dorothy's.

My Mother, meanwhile, was bustling hither and thither, followed by Patty and the maids with tankards of good ale and mead. This refreshment was intended for the workers only, while the children and idle folk were meant to partake as freely as they liked of buttermilk and small-beer: thus nicely did my Mother discriminate between worth and folly. But her thrifty plans were set at naught by my Father, who in the warmth of his hospitality declared he would have no hog-wash or cask-swillings drunk upon his premises that day, and that all who came there, whether for work or play, should, as he expressed it, have summat to hearten 'em up.

A good dinner had already been partaken of by all who had helped us in earnest, and indeed not even the laziest urchin who entered our yard that day went away empty.

I was drinking and laughing like the rest when a voice at my elbow made me start, and, turning, I beheld Master Robert in converse with my Mother.

"'Tis as well her Ladyship is not here this afternoon," said he. "I think, good Dame, she would scarcely be pleased with such doings as these which savour of riot and waste."

"They have worked well, I'm sure, Sir," responded she, her comely face clouding over, "and deserve a bit o' pleasure to help 'em on wi't."

"Why should you find fault with our harmless merriment?" cried Dorothy, stepping forward. "'Tis ever your pleasure, I think, to be a Spoilsport, Mr. Bilborough."

It was the first time I think that she had addressed him since the day he had insulted her, and I looked at her in surprise; had she not been more than commonly excited, I doubt she would not have deigned to notice him.

Master Robert, too, seemed taken aback for the moment, but, speedily recovering himself, he glanced with a sneer at the child which she carried, and returned in so loud a voice that it was heard even amid the confusion around us:—

"Spoilsport do you call me, Madam? A good many of this jovial company before now have applied that word to yourself, and I wonder, indeed, they should be so merry in your presence, for I have heard it said that you bring ill luck to all with whom you come in contact. It must be a trusting Mother, indeed, who would leave her little one in your care."

Now the child in question was, as I have said, sickly, having been almost from its birth subject to fits; and as ill luck would have it, and possibly because his sinister face and angry voice alarmed it, Master Robert had no sooner spoken than the little creature flung itself back in Dorothy's arms, stiffened itself and was seized with a convulsion.

"Did I not say well?" cried Master Bilborough, raising his voice yet more. "Misfortune does certainly seem to come to all who deal with you, Madam. 'Tis a strange seizure, and I think the Mother had done better to have kept the child away from you. Where is the Mother?"

And with that, leaving us, he mingled with the merry-makers, and we saw him speak to this one and that one, and each of those whom he accosted immediately turned round with a face of anger and horror; and all at once the music ceased, and a crowd rushed towards the doorway with loud cries of "Witch! Witch!"

The smouldering hatred which so many entertained for the helpless girl broke out in a flame, and no doubt the strong drink, which my Father had so incautiously pressed upon them, clouded their wits and inflamed their fury. Their aspect was so threatening, and their excitement so great, that the bravest woman might well have been terrified. Such an accusation is no empty one, and as a rule is productive of direful consequences; but Dorothy seemed to have no thought except for the child, which she clutched affrightedly to her bosom.

"Help! help!" she cried. "I think it is dying!"

Then—I scarce know how it all happened, but in a moment as it seemed to me the poor babe was reft from her, and Dorothy herself was struggling in the rude grasp of many hands. I saw my Father laying about him with his staff, and Patty running hither and thither wringing her hands, and I heard my Mother scream, and little Johnny yell "Murder!" and then I beheld Dorothy carried along in the midst of what I could have thought a crew of devils, so fierce were their faces, so savage the clamour they kept up. "To the horsepond!" shouted some one. And then the cry arose: "The cucking-stool! The cucking-stool!"

"Nay," yelled one of her own men, a fellow who had eaten of her bread and accepted of her bounty for nigh upon half a year, "nay, the Scold's bridle first. I'm sure she has a shrewdish tongue enough!" "Let her be whipped through the town at the cart's tail!" screamed another, and there were some who shouted persistently, "Burn her! Burn her! Burn the Witch!"

At this cry my senses, which had been paralysed by the suddenness and horror of the attack, now returned to me, and I rushed upon the villains nearest to me with the fury and well-nigh the strength of a giant, but I was outnumbered, of course, and presently they got me down, and some of them hammered me, while half a dozen more pinned me to the ground. While I lay struggling, as much for my own life now as for Dorothy's, I heard Master Robert's voice uplifted in shrill triumph.

"Ha! well aimed! Though she is a Witch I see she can bleed."

And over the crowd of swaying forms and evil faces a stone went whizzing and then another; and then there came a faint cry—aye, even amid all the hubbub I heard it, for it was Dorothy's voice. And then, almost immediately, they who held me relaxed their grip, and the mob fell back, and there stood Sir Jocelyn grasping his sword, speechless and apparently transfixed with wrath, but more terrible in his mute and motionless fury than if he had stormed and raged. He was like a lion crouching for a spring, or it might be an avenging angel poisoning his fiery blade that his vengeance might be more sure.

A hush fell upon us all; the turbulent crowd fell apart, too much scared, it seemed, to fly. Master Bilborough, indeed, would have slunk away, but Sir Jocelyn, suddenly coming to himself, arrested him with so threatening a gesture that he paused, quaking.

Then Sir Jocelyn stepped across to where Dorothy stood, trembling like an aspen leaf and white as death, the blood dripping from an ugly gash on her fair arm. My Mother was already beside her, and our Patty ; but Sir Jocelyn, pushing them aside, began with hasty, eager fingers to bind up the wound with his own handkerchief, crying aloud in a choked voice, the while :—

“Oh, you shall all pay dear for this ! By Heaven, you shall pay for it ! You shall know whom you have outraged and insulted this day. I swear I will destroy you all ! By —— I will. I’ll drive you from your homes, I’ll ruin you ! Dolts ! I hold you all in the hollow of my hand, and you have dared to attack my Wife !”

I glanced quickly at Dorothy to see if she would contradict him, but she made no sign ; rather in her stress of anguish seemed to lean upon and cling to him.

“She shall be my Wife, I say,” cried he, “your Mistress and Liege Lady, whom ye shall honour as ye honour myself. See what fools you have been ! Take my sweet Lady indoors, Dame Forshaw,” he said, his voice all at once infinitely gentle. “Try to comfort and restore her while I deal with these folks.”

My Mother and Patty led away Dorothy, who in her weak and trembling state offered no more opposition to their kind offices than to Sir Jocelyn’s impetuous assertion ; and when the door closed behind her the latter turned to his Kinsman.

“Cousin,” he cried, drawing in his breath sharply as he seized him by the shoulder. “Cousin, what shall I do to you ? Before Heaven, I have a mind to kill you !”

Writhing in his fierce clutch Master Billsborough strove to throw himself upon his knees, faintly stammering, “Mercy ! mercy ! Your blood flows in my veins !”

“Aye, indeed, to my everlasting disgrace !” thundered

Sir Jocelyn. "Look at him, you folks, look at him. Faugh! my stomach turns at the sight of him. Out of my house you shall go this day, Robert Bilsborough, but that these friends and followers of yours may have leisure to study their leader, you shall sit where they may feast their eyes on him. Away with him to the Stocks!"

He signed to two or three stout fellows, who came forward uncertainly.

"To the Stocks with him, I say!" cried Sir Jocelyn. "And now, folks, you must yield up the man who threw that stone."

Almost instantaneously a score of hands pointed to James Brewster; in truth he was not much beloved in the place, having too long been Master Bilsborough's companion not to have learnt some of his bullying ways. The villagers had been quick enough to believe his slanderous tales against Mrs. Dorothy, but for all that few there present would not rejoice at his downfall.

"So it was you, James Brewster!" cried Sir Jocelyn. "I might have known it. Well, I am glad there is not such another villain in the place. Oh, you are indeed a worthy follower of your Master. Well, you shall sit beside him and keep him company; and you may be sure I shall not blame any one who pays you back in kind. Since the game of stone-throwing pleases you, you shall enjoy it to your heart's content, I promise you. And when these folks have done with you, you shall pack bag and baggage, you and all your kin, from the oldest to the youngest. Harken to me now," cried Sir Jocelyn, raising his voice and gazing round at the trembling bystanders, "I make an example of these two, and by Heaven! I will do the like and worse to any man who dares raise a finger against Dorothy Ullathorne. Lady

Gillibrand shall she be as soon as may be, and woe be to any one that dares offer her an affront."

Once more he signed to those who stood near Master Robert, and they carried him away, shrieking like a woman, while half a dozen more laid hold of James Brewster and dragged him in his wake.

I heard they had hard usage enough while they were confined in the Stocks, for many were the grudges which the villagers bore both to Master Robert and his tool, and a fallen tyrant is like to fare ill at the hands of those upon whom he has hitherto trampled. But I troubled myself little about their fate, for my whole mind was taken up with wondering whether Mrs. Dorothy would indeed suffer herself to be overborne by Sir Jocelyn, or whether, on recovering from the recent shock, her faithful attachment to my Master would reassert itself.

I followed him into the house, therefore, and kept by him, while he strode up to the settle where they had laid her, and bent over her and took her hand.

"Useless to struggle, sweet love," said he. "You must come to me now. You must let me protect and guard you for the future."

She was still shaking all over, her beautiful eyes starting from her pale face, her very lips bloodless.

"Let me take care of you, sweet," said he. "How can you help it? Fate has driven you into my arms."

She gazed at him like one distraught; then pulled down the bandage a little from her wounded arm and looked at the gash; the blood began to flow again and she shuddered.

"The voices," she said, as though to herself, "the voices! They wanted to burn me!"

She looked towards the fire that went leaping up our great chimney, and back again at her arm.

Sir Jocelyn ground his teeth and then dropped on his knees beside her, encircling her waist with his arm.

"Who shall dare to hurt you now?" he whispered.

She shrank away from him a little, and then her hand, creeping upwards, sought the token in her bosom. She unfastened it and looked at it half-vacantly.

"*Et semper*," she murmured, "I writ it with my own hand—I could not break my vow!"

Then a sudden frenzy came upon Sir Jocelyn, and he became as fierce as he had been tender and considerate before. He sprang to his feet, and before she had time to realize his intention, much less to resist it, he snatched the trinket from her hand and ground it beneath his heavy boot. In a moment the frail thing was shattered; but not content with that, he picked up the fragments and flung them—crystal and hair and all—into the glowing heat of the fire.

"There is an end of that!" cried he. "Madam, he has had his chance and lost it: now it is my turn. You will not dispose of me as easily. I will take possession of you for your own good. Come, let me send for Parson Formby to marry us at once."

"Oh, no!" she gasped, "no!" And then, bursting into a passion of tears, "Oh, why did you burn it—why did you burn his hair?"

"Madam," returned Sir Jocelyn passionately, "so will I destroy the man himself if he comes between us now. You are mine, I say. Have I not brought you back from the jaws of death? You had been ashes by now had I not come in time to save you."

She fell back well-nigh fainting, and Sir Jocelyn, once more kneeling, gathered her in his arms.

"I have saved you once," he said, "I would save you still from yourself and your own folly. You are mine by

every law of God and man—by the right of a love which I swear has never had an equal. Come, let the Parson wed us, love, and let me carry you away.”

“Oh, Sir,” she wailed, “I have no love for you.”

“I do not ask for love,” he returned, his passion leaving him of a sudden and his voice becoming grave and gentle once more. “I only ask for the right to cherish and worship you, to keep all harm away from you, to protect you even against yourself. Resist no more, my dear. Heaven has delivered you into my hand. *He* has lost you, but I have won.”

“But if you knew——” she was beginning, when he interrupted her impetuously.

“Let the past lie. I do not wish to know; I will never ask you a question. I am content to take you as you are—without your confidence—without your love.”

“Oh, then, indeed——” said she falteringly, and then paused. “Give me time,” she sighed at last, and disengaging herself she pushed him gently from her. “I must have a month to think of it. Oh, yes, Sir—indeed, I must have a month.”

We had all stood round during this colloquy, too much interested to bethink us of withdrawing, or even to make a pretence of attending to our own affairs; but none of us had ventured to break silence until now, when my Father burst out impatiently:—

“Sure, Madam, you are too hard with the noble Gentleman. I marvel he has so much patience with you.”

“Nay, James,” returned Sir Jocelyn smiling, “I will even have patience to wait a month so that she promise to wed me at the end of it.”

“I did not say that!” she exclaimed. “Oh, why can you not leave me in peace? Why do you all harry me?”

I am so weary. I am dizzy and ill. Everything is confused! Have you no pity?"

"Pity, indeed!" cried my Father. "The great trouble, to be sure! To be asked to make the finest match in the country by the kindest Gentleman in the world—and you a penniless lass, and all this queer talk about you! There's not another Gentleman, no, nor another man, high or low, as would up and ax you that straightfor'ard, and promisn' to ax no questions an' all, and the only answer you give him is to tell him to his face you don't love him. For shame of ye, my dear!"

Tears burst from her eyes afresh.

"Oh, I know he is generous," she cried, "and good—too good for me. I will try and be generous, too, Sir Jocelyn. I will try. I think the answer will be yes."

"Well, I must be content with that," replied he, very sorrowfully. "You will try to make the sacrifice. Well, so be it. I may hope to possess the husk though the heart will be for ever sealed to me."

And, thereupon, Sir Jocelyn kissed her hand, and went away with a downcast face and a dragging gait, sorely unlike that befitting a successful wooer.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A PORTENT AND A VISIT.

LATE that evening there came a hurried tap at the door, and Mrs. Penny entered with a scared face.

"Is she here? Is Mrs. Ullathorne here?" she inquired.

"I have persuaded her to lie down upstairs," returned my Mother. "I doubt she'll have a fever or some such thing."

"I was to bring this note to her," resumed Mrs. Penny, "'tis from Sir Jocelyn. Oh, what doings, Farmer Forshaw!"

Here she dropped her voice and looked round with an expression half-terrified, half-important.

"Did you know that Cousin Robert Bilsborough has been in the Stocks?"

"Aye, indeed," returned my Father, "and serve him right too. I hope the lads gave him a mauling!"

"Oh fie, Mr. Forshaw, you should not say such things. But indeed he is badly bruised, and his dress in such a state—torn and dirty and stinking. They pelted him with rotten eggs among other things."

"I'm glad on't," broke out little Patty vindictively. "Rotten eggs! Ha, ha!—well they could not hurt him much; but the stone which James Brewster flung by his orders has made such a wound on my sweet Dorothy's arm."

"Hush, for shame of thee, Patty, Child," said my Mother in a scandalized tone. "We must not forget that Master

Robert is one of the Quality, and own Cousin to Sir Jocelyn and her Ladyship—and what says her Ladyship, Madam?”

“Oh, I am nigh distraught, good Mrs. Forshaw,” groaned Mrs. Penny, “I think her Ladyship will die of it. Sir Jocelyn told her all in a breath that he meant to marry that young woman, and that he had put Cousin Robert in the Stocks and intended to send him to the right about. And when my Lady asked him how our unfortunate Kinsman would live if he deprived him thus of a home, he returned with such a strange laugh: ‘Why, Madam, his chastisement will be a severe one, but I mean it to be such. He must work—work like an honest man!’ And then nothing would serve him but that her Ladyship must send the coach immediately hither to carry Mrs. Ullathorne to Ferneby, for, said he, it were not fitting that his future Wife should expose herself to further danger and insult by living in yonder ramshackle place.”

“And is the coach coming to fetch her?” inquired my Mother with a startled look. “We made her promise to bide with us till the month is out that she is to keep Sir Jocelyn waiting.”

“No, she is not to go there till to-morrow,” said Mrs. Penny, “for you must know my Cousin, Lady Gillibrand, fell into so violent a fit of Hysterics on hearing the proposal that we were all frightened out of our wits. She intends to leave the place herself to-morrow and journey to the Dower House in Yorkshire. She will not, she declares, remain an hour in the house with that designing hussy, as she calls the young woman Ullathorne; and Sir Jocelyn himself is going away that he may not distress or importune Mrs. Dorothy by his company. I think he says as much in this letter.”

"I will give it to her," said Patty quickly; and taking the note from Mrs. Penny's hand she ran upstairs with it.

She returned presently with a serious face.

"Dorothy sends her grateful duty to Sir Jocelyn and is much obliged to him," quoted she, "but she could not accept his offer. She would rather remain here with us as has been settled; and she prays Sir Jocelyn not to leave his home, and to persuade her Ladyship to remain there. And now she is weeping again," went on Patty, much distressed, "after all the trouble we had to pacify her. I wish we had not given her the letter to-night. She says she brings trouble on every one and she wishes she were dead."

"Oh, hush! fie!" commented Mrs. Dugden, "'twas very ill done of the young female to say such a thing, and you should not repeat it. Now I must go back to Sir Jocelyn, and I suppose he will be in a taking at her answer. Oh dear, oh dear!" groaned the poor lady, "I'm sure I don't know what I shall do among 'em all. Her Ladyship is bent on leaving to-morrow, and her woman and I will be up half the night packing for her. Doctor Bradley has given her a composing Draught, so it is to be hoped she will sleep, but what we are to do to-morrow when we are so far from the worthy Gentleman I can't think."

Here the tears started to her eyes, and she continued in a quavering voice: "Such a break-up as it is—the Doctor will, of course, remain behind. And there is poor Master Robert such a figure, and all his things to be got together, and sent to him at the Sign of the Hen and Chickens, for Sir Jocelyn would not suffer him to stay a moment in the house, when he came up after being freed from the Stocks. Indeed, I cannot help saying it—my Cousin Jocelyn is as savage as a bear where he is con-

cerned. I think he would have kept him all night in the Stocks if my Lady had not insisted on his release. It is all so strange and I am so much upset——” here her voice became inarticulate and she wiped her eyes.

“I wouldn’t take on so if I was you, Ma’am,” urged my Mother, in her soft, cooing tones. “Maybe her Ladyship won’t leave when she hears as Dorothy is so set again’ going up to the Hall. Maybe naught ’ull come of it after all. The poor lass don’t seem to take very kindly to the notion o’ weddin’ Sir Jocelyn—nay, she didn’t seem to take to it kindly at all.”

But here my Father interrupted her with a sort of roar, and thumped the floor with his stick; and Mrs. Penny, rising with an offended air, remarked that she was sure she didn’t know what the world was coming to, and that things would be at a pretty pass indeed if a girl like Dorothy Ullathorne refused a Gentleman like Sir Jocelyn; but that, taking one thing with another, she herself did not know if she were on her head or her heels. And thereupon, becoming doleful once more, she desired me, in a lamentable tone, to open the door for her, and summoning John Footman, who was standing in the yard with his lantern waiting to escort her home, requested him almost with a moan to lead the way.

When the faint patter, patter of her footsteps had died away, Patty, who had been sitting on the hearthrug at my Father’s feet, suddenly broke silence.

“I agree with you, Sir,” said she, “I think Dorothy will marry Sir Jocelyn.”

“Why should you say that?” cried I; and there rose up before me a vision of my Master’s face as I had last seen it, and I seemed to hear his voice—“Farewell, good Luke—be my friend still while I am away”. I bethought me of the grasp of his strong and slender hand—that

hand which he had extended to me in such frank good-fellowship as though I had indeed been his friend and comrade. What kind of friend was I, if I could stand by calmly while his Mistress was filched away from him? My blood grew hot within me so that I did not catch the beginning of Patty's eager rejoinder.

"—All these things and many more she said to me," went on the little lass, "I think the fright and the pain of her arm made her a bit light-headed. She keeps on talking half to me and half to herself. 'There is no other way out of it,' she says. And then, 'Sir Jocelyn is right; I believe it is my fate'. And she said just now, 'After all it is better for both of us to make an end of what can never come to a happy issue'."

"Pray what did she mean by that?" said my Mother, who was much mystified.

In her excitement Patty had evidently forgotten that here she was treading on dangerous ground and might, in another moment, have dropped some more tell-tale hint of Dorothy's secret if I had not coughed so loudly, as not only to attract her attention but to draw down upon myself the wrath of my Father, who desired to know what I meant by letting off my "hm's" and "ha's" as though they were gunshots, and informed me that if I could not control myself I had better walk out into the yard.

I went out, nothing loth, but not before I had shaken my head vehemently at Patty, and observed from her conscience-stricken face that I had recalled her to a sense of her error.

Mrs. Dorothy did not come among us again for some days and, when at last sufficiently recovered to leave her bed, crept about with so wan and pitiful a face that it would have melted a heart of stone. I think even those

who had been most violent against her would have been touched at her altered mien and spiritless voice ; but indeed not many came nigh our place at that time. The Hall was deserted, both Sir Jocelyn and her Ladyship having carried out their intentions, and our own neighbours kept away from us from shame.

As for Lychgate, it was tenantless during those days, even Malachi having disappeared in his usually mysterious manner, shortly after the unlucky day of our great Breaking. Fleetfoot was stabled in one of our spare stalls, and our folks saw to the remainder of Mrs. Dorothy's live stock. It made a deal of work for my Mother, who was obliged to undertake the management of Mrs. Dorothy's dairy as well as her own, and my Father, too, was kept busy between the two places. But they undertook the labour willingly for friendship's sake. As my Father said, it would not last long.

One day, commenting on Malachi's absence to Patty, I was surprised to see the little wench assume a knowing air.

"I think," said she, "he has gone to visit one you know."

"What—Mrs. Dorothy's lover?" I stammered.

"Yes, indeed," answered she, "for the day before he went Dorothy was writing and writing, and then tearing up all she writ and weeping, and then writing again. And I saw a little packet in her hand when she sent for Malachi to see her privately in her chamber. And one thing—she wears no more that token round her neck."

"Why, Sir Jocelyn destroyed it," said I.

"The brooch, yes, though, dost thou know, she made me rake out the ashes to see if I could find a trace of it, and I picked up a little lump of gold. She looked so strange when I gave it to her, and I have never seen it

since ; but the other was a coin or rather the half of a coin, pierced so that a ribbon could be run through it, and this she always wore round her neck."

"Well," said I, "we shall see what we shall see ; but it would surprise me much if yonder Gentleman submitted tamely. I wonder if she has told him of Sir Jocelyn's offer."

We were sitting round the fire an evening or two after this, Johnny being a-bed, Patty as usual installed in her favourite place at my Father's feet, and Mrs. Dorothy seated opposite gazing pensively into the flames, when Patty broke a long silence by exclaiming :—

"We shall have a visitor soon !"

"How can you tell that ?" cried her friend in a startled tone.

"Why don't you see that big flake of soot on the second bar of the grate? 'Tis a certain sign, for I'm sure the grate is scraped bright enough every morning, so it couldn't ha' got there by chance."

"On the second bar dost thou say, Child ?" asked my Mother. "Then 'twill be a man !"

"What folly !" exclaimed Dorothy sharply, and stooping she seized the poker, making as though she would do away at once with the unwelcome omen. But Patty with a little scream stayed her hand.

"Bide a bit ! bide a bit !—Let's see how soon we may expect him ? One ! Two !——"

She clapped her hands, and at the second stroke the flake flew off.

"It'll be the day arter to-morrow !" cried Patty triumphantly.

"I never heard such nonsense !" exclaimed Mrs. Ullathorne. She had not spoke with such spirit since the day of our Breaking, and we all looked at her in sur-

prise. She had risen, and even in the firelight we saw how flushed her face was.

"Happen it will be Sir Jocelyn," says my Father, removing his pipe and raising himself a little in his chair.

"No, indeed," returned she vehemently, "he is a man of his word, and would never come before the allotted time."

"Then it 'ull be somebody else," said my Mother decidedly. "I have never known that token fail. I wonder who it can be. 'Tisn't as if 'twas market day neither!"

"A Pedlar maybe," said I quickly, for I saw that Dorothy grew even more discomposed.

"Very like," said my Mother. "I'm sure I wish some travelling body o' that mak' would come round, for thy last year's winter petticoat is a disgrace, Patty."

"And I could like a new kerchief, too," put in Patty.

Then while the two fell to planning about their duds, Dorothy slipped quietly from the room.

All next day, however, she was nervous and agitated, and on the following morning she could scarce sit to her breakfast. I own to having felt a bit excited myself all that day, and I won't say but what I put Chestnut to a brisker pace on returning from the office than that at which he was used to carry me. I flung the reins to Stumpy on reaching home and, without pausing to see how my poor nag was done to, I hurried into the house.

They were all sitting in the parlour as usual, though I noticed that Dorothy had half risen from her chair, and that her face was turned towards the door as though in expectancy.

"I knew it could be nobody but Luke," cried Patty reassuringly, as I entered. "Think no more on the omen, Dorothy—I daresay 'tis all foolishness."

"I wouldn't say that," put in my Mother, nodding her

head, "but it 'ull not be the Pedlar, as how 'tis, for he never comes so late."

None of us spoke much at supper ; I think, in spite of ourselves, we were all anxious and ill at ease, and we had well-nigh finished when of a sudden we heard the distant beat of horse's hoofs. We looked at each other, and my Father set down his tankard rather noisily and said :—

"'Tis some traveller on the way to Upton".

But the sound came nearer, and we held our breath ; and the yard dog began to bark, and then we heard the gate swing on its hinges, and then the horse proceeding at a foot's pace as though he were being led, and all at once a voice cried out close beneath our windows :—

"Is there any one here who will take my horse?"

We had all sat as though turned to stone, but at the sound of that voice I looked at Dorothy, and I saw that she had fallen back in her chair. Her lips were parted, her eyes strained, but she did not say a word.

"Well, to be sure!" exclaimed my Mother. "So it's come true after all! You'd best go out, Luke, and see to the horse."

"Stumpy's there," said I. For the life of me I could not have moved.

My Father pushed back his chair and grasped his stick, but before he could rise to his feet the house door, which was not yet bolted, was opened from without, and a breath of cold air rushed into the room, for the parlour door stood ajar. In another moment this too was flung back, and there stood a tall man in black, with a pale face and eyes that seemed to shoot forth flames. I had not noticed that it was raining, but a sharp shower must have come on while we were at table for his fair locks hung lank from their ribbon, and the moisture dripped from his hat and clothes on to the floor.

Not one word did he speak by way of greeting, but his gleaming eyes swept round the table and rested on Dorothy, to whom he immediately made an imperious sign with his hand.

Thereupon, also without a word, she got up, pushed past my Father, who would have stayed her, went towards my Master with a swift if unsteady gait, and the two stepped forth together into the dusk.

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed my Mother, as the house door closed behind them. "Did ever a body hear o' such a thing? Who is the Gentleman, and what does he want comin' here at this time o' night? Come back, Dorothy!" she cried, hastening to the door, "come back! Why," she added, "they've gone into the orchard. And the rain comin' down fit to drown them both, and the grass long enough to reach her knees welly. I'll go and——"

"You stop here, Missus," cried my Father in a tone of command which he rarely assumed towards her, "I'll see to this myself. Pretty doin's indeed! And that honourable Gentleman, Sir Jocelyn, puttin' all his trust in her. I couldn't have believed it o' the wench. To see her walk off wi' that gallant the very minute he crooked his finger! I'll make an end on't—I'll not have her carryin' on wi' a strange Wooster in my house."

"Pray, Sir," said I, springing up from my chair and rushing towards him, "pray, Sir, do not disturb them. 'Tis her Kinsman, I think—'tis an old friend at any rate, for I have seen him before."

"Have ye indeed, and why didst never say naught about it?" returned he; then growing suddenly wroth again, "Then why can't she talk to her Kinsman, or her friend, or whoever the spark may be, indoors like any other decent lass, instead of trapezing off to the orchard. Run out, Patty, and bid them come in at once."

"Stay where you are, Patty," cried I—"I beg your pardon, Sir," I stammered, turning to my Father again, "but indeed I think they may want to talk private-like, and could not very well speak out before us all."

"Pooh!" cried he, with ever-increasing anger, "did not his Honour Sir Jocelyn speak out his mind before us willing enough? Aye, and the lass made no to-do about it, neither. I'll not have such doings, I say. Bid them come in out of the rain, I tell ye! If thou's met the man before, thou'd best go, Luke; but come in they must."

My Father was not to be gainsaid, and thinking it were better to go myself than to suffer any other messenger to be despatched in my stead, I made my way across the yard and through the wicket gate into the great orchard which lay behind our house; the rain all the time beating upon my bare head and lashing my face.

It was almost dark now, but I could discover the two figures standing at the further end of the place, Dorothy's white dress marking her outline more plain than that other shape which stood facing it, and which seemed to loom gigantically tall.

I stumbled forward slowly, often falling up against the low-growing branches of an apple or a plum tree, the twigs sometimes scratching my face and sometimes catching in my clothes. I called aloud I know not what, as I walked, but they took no heed of me, and when I was within twenty paces of them I saw Dorothy's figure engulfed in the embrace of the tall dark one, and I heard her voice raised as if with a note of agony.

"Only you—there is only, only you!"

But even before I reached them, I saw them fall apart, and Dorothy turning began to run towards the house, groping her way with her wavering hands.

I would have stopped her, but she made blind rush past me, and I heard her stumble against a tree, at which she uttered a little cry, but immediately went forward again, moaning to herself, I believe unconsciously.

I hastened towards my Master, who had meanwhile remained motionless where she had left him.

"Will you not come indoors?" said I. "'Tis a wild night, and you are welcome to speak to Mrs. Dorothy as private as you like."

He roused himself with a start.

"Nay, Luke," he returned, "I have no more business with that lady. We have settled our affair—all except one small account which I shall render to her shortly. We have not been long, have we? Five minutes here under the trees. And I have rid hundreds of miles to see her. A long way for five minutes—and pressing my poor Star sorely. Well, now we must ride away again."

"Oh, Sir," I pleaded, "come in at least for an hour's rest. You will kill your poor beast!"

"We must risk that," said he. "No, Luke. 'Tis her wish, and who could thwart a Lady's wish? Come, fetch out my nag and let us talk no more."

I led the way in silence to the stable, and pushing Stumpy on one side as he would have offered his services, I saddled Star with much compassion for the gallant beast's evident distress, and held my Master's stirrup once more with trembling fingers, while the heart in my breast was as heavy as lead.

He stooped towards me as he gathered up his reins.

"Tell Mrs. Ullathorne," said he, "that though I may not write to her, she shall get news of me before long. News which she may perchance not like to hear."

And with a low, and to my mind a singular laugh, he rode away into the darkness and the rain.

CHAPTER XXV.

SIR JOCELYN SEEKS HIS ANSWER.

DOROTHY ULLATHORNE had been pallid and spiritless enough before my Master's visit, but her condition during the ensuing days fair frightened us all. It required all my Mother's persuasions to induce her to swallow a mouthful, though that dear woman concocted abundance of possets and infusions to tempt her appetite ; and our Patty averred that her friend scarce closed her eyes at night. On one occasion only, during the week which followed the unlooked-for visit, was she roused from her apathy, and that was when, finding her wandering alone in the garden, I deemed it a good opportunity to deliver my Master's message.

"I was bid to tell you," said I, "by—by *him*, that though he might not see or write to you, you should have news of him before long."

"Did he say so, indeed?" cried she, and the colour rushed to her face.

"Yes, indeed," I returned, "news which he said you might perchance not care to hear."

"What did he mean by that?" cried she, catching her breath.

"I cannot tell, I am sure," said I.

"It is a threat I know," she went on with increasing agitation. "Oh, Luke, why do they all torment me? Why must even he seek to punish me for what I cannot

help? Is not my burden almost greater than I can bear?"

"Madam," said I, "I find it hard to believe that he would seek to hurt you in any way, but I suppose the poor Gentleman is heart-broken about your marriage to Sir Jocelyn."

"My marriage to Sir Jocelyn!" echoed she. "No, Luke; he does not fret himself about that, for he knows well enough what my mind is on the point."

As I stood staring, she desired me in a tone of extreme sharpness to leave off gaping at her; and then when I turned away, rather hurt in my feelings, she suddenly caught me by the arm. Her bosom was heaving with agitation, and her eyes shone like stars in that pitiful face of hers.

"Luke," she whispered, "you who know him, you who have felt just a little of that power of his—surely you understand?"

"Who?" cried I, bewildered, "Sir Jocelyn?"

But at that she flung away my arm and hastened from me into the house.

And then I bethought me—for my wits are clear enough if they move somewhat slowly—of how she had clung to my Master, and with what a choked and agonized voice she had cried out to him—"Only you—only, only you!" And it seemed to me very probable that she would not wed Sir Jocelyn after all.

I was careful, however, to keep my surmise to myself, even when it turned out to be correct, and I would the rest of my family had been equally discreet. But when, in due time, Sir Jocelyn came for his answer, my Father must needs blurt out the tale of the strange gallant who had called so late and stayed such a short time, and ridden away so fast after he had discoursed Mrs. Ullathorne in the rain.

"And since then," continued the good man, "that bonny lass is but the shadow of herself. And if summat isn't done soon, your Honour, 'tis my belief she'll slip through your fingers."

"Ah," said my Mother, with that doleful pleasure which some folks seem to feel in making melancholy prognostics, "she might very well go off in a decline, Sir Jocelyn. I have seen lasses do the like as didn't look half so bad as she does already."

The brightness faded from Sir Jocelyn's face as he gazed from one to the other. I could not but feel sorry for him, for I must own I had never seen him look so joyous and gallant as when he burst in upon us that evening. He wore a riding suit of crimson cloth, much laced, with great sparkling buttons on either side; and his ruffles were the fullest and the finest I had ever seen, and though his face was somewhat paler than usual it was full of eagerness. I saw he had made sure of his answer, but now a kind of cloud fell upon him, at once of wrath and grief, and it was in a harsh tone that he announced he must speak with Mrs. Dorothy at once.

"She is lying down upstairs," said little Patty fearfully. "Indeed she is not well this evening, your Honour."

"Tell her I must see her," returned he. "She knows well enough what day it is, and the excuse will not serve her. Tell her I will go up and speak with her yonder if she will not come down. Tell her I desire she will come out and take the air with me in the orchard—since she is so fond of walking there. I will have my answer to-night—by Heaven I will!" cried Sir Jocelyn.

Patty went upstairs, and Sir Jocelyn stood by the table with a moody brow and without offering to speak a word till she returned.

"Dorothy will be down in a few minutes," she said.

Sir Jocelyn heaved a sigh of relief, and then half absently drew a little packet from his bosom and turned it over in his hand. It was a small velvet case, such as are used to contain jeweller's wares.

By and by the door slowly opened and Dorothy stood on the threshold, looking so ill and feeble, and withal in such evident terror, that I hoped Sir Jocelyn would have mercy upon her and forbear to press the question that night. But he strode towards her in silence and offered her his hand. Then, as she could scarce stand, much less walk, he passed his arm round her waist and so almost carried her out of doors. But this he did in a most unloverlike fashion, with no tenderness in look or gesture; and I seemed to catch the infection of the poor lady's fear as I watched them disappear together.

'Twas but a few minutes, I suppose, but it seemed to be an age, before he came rushing back, wild-eyed, and the whole of his great frame shaking with passion. My Mother, catching him by the sleeve, gave utterance to the secret fear which suddenly paralysed us all.

"Your Honour," she gasped, "you have not killed her?"

"No," he exclaimed with a great oath, "but I will kill him. I swear I will! You all saw it," he cried in a voice which had suddenly become piteous, "she was willing to take me—she had all but promised. But at the mere sight of his face she throws me over. Oh, by—the world is not great enough to hold us two! Either he or I must out of it!—and I think 'twill be he."

We stood about him, trembling, all of us, little Johnny sobbing and hiding behind my Mother—even my Father had such a scared face as I had never seen him wear.

Thrusting his hand into his bosom Sir Jocelyn once more drew out the velvet jewel-case and weighed it in

his fingers ; his brows knit and his whole face darkening. Then he opened it and held it out for us to see ; it contained a most beautiful ring of sparkling stones, diamonds I think, set about a great red one which must have been a ruby.

"I thought to plight her my troth with this," said he, "but she would have none of it. Here, Johnny, my lad, is a pretty bauble for thee to play with."

Wheeling about he flung it towards the child, who drew back affrighted.

As we all cried out in protest, he turned upon us with one of his sudden gusts of anger.

"And pray," said he, "of what value is it to me now? Let him drop it down the well if he pleases."

Then, with a change of tone, and speaking as though to himself—"But some rings have a special value which folks guess not". And throwing back his head he laughed under his breath. "A sheaf of feathers out of a coronet!" says he.

My Mother sat down suddenly, turning quite pale and striking her breast ; and Patty uttered a little scream, and my Father, glancing at me from behind Sir Jocelyn's back, touched his own forehead significantly. Indeed we all thought the poor Gentleman had taken leave of his senses, for, as my Mother subsequently said, though a sheaf of corn was common enough, sure no one had ever heard of a sheaf of feathers.

It was Patty who first spoke, however ; said she :—

"And where is my poor Dorothy all this time?"

Then Sir Jocelyn appeared to come to himself with a start.

"I left her in the orchard. You had best see to her—you and your Mother. She was well-nigh swooning, I think—Oh," he cried, brokenly, "and I would have so

cherished her! I would have kept the very winds from blowing upon her."

I saw that his heart was wrung at the recollection of her pitiful plight; yet her pain itself seemed to lash him to fresh frenzy, for even while I was casting about in my mind for words wherewith to console him, he burst forth again passionately:—

"Nay, but he shall pay for it. Aye, to the last farthing he shall. I will track him out; I will track him out."

And with that he was gone.

My Mother and Patty had already hastened to Dorothy's assistance, and Johnny had made his escape. My Father and I left alone stared at each other blankly; then says my Father:—

"My word! this is a nice coil—'tis that. This comes o' yon plaguy meddlesome fellow in black poking his nose where 'twasn't wanted. Thou might ha' made shift to keep him off, I think, since thou know'd summat about him."

"Me, Father!" cried I, much aggrieved.

"Aye—thou wast the only one as know'd aught about him. Didn't thou say he were the wench's Kinsman? A pretty tale, indeed! Kinsman, forsooth!"

"I'm sure I don't know why I said so," murmured I, and I stood for a moment cudgelling my brains in the endeavour to discover why the notion had taken such firm hold of me. Mrs. Dorothy and my Master were sure as unlike in their complexions as could be, yet for all that I could not but fancy there was a resemblance between them; something in the manner, sundry tricks of speech, certain tones even in their voices recalled in each the other.

"Well," says my Father, drawing a long breath, "'tis to be hoped, Luke, as this will learn thee not to be making

too free wi' folks as thou knows naught about. A deal of this here kettle of fish as is marred in the boiling may be laid at thy door, I reckon."

His meaning was clear enough if the words were a little obscure, and seeing that he was determined to hold me accountable in some measure for a state of affairs which so much displeased him, I deemed it useless to protest further, and stood by in silence while he hobbled across the room, and after hunting about for some time picked up the jewel-case which Johnny had not ventured to touch, and which he now placed on the mantelshef, groaning to himself and clacking his tongue.

Presently Patty came down, her little face all blurred with weeping.

"I think she'll die o' this," said she.

My Father uttered an angry exclamation.

"I've no patience wi' the wench," cried he, "wi' her secrets and shilly-shally work and what not. She should ha' know'd her own mind, I say; she shouldn't ha' led Sir Jocelyn such a dance if her thoughts were so took up wi' t'other young spark ——"

"Oh, but," interrupted Patty, "she will have none of him either. She says she will wed no man. She told his Honour so, thinking to comfort him, and even showed him the ring which had been her gift to the other Gentleman, and which she had back from him t'other night, thinking the sight would pacify him; but she said it seemed only to inflame his rage, and he fair threw himself upon it, gazing at it with so strange a look that she thought he was going mad."

Thus little Patty, speaking very solemnly and making her blue eyes very round. Neither of us could then read the riddle, though light enough was thrown on it later.

"Of course," resumed she, "I would not distress poor

Dorothy by telling her all the things Sir Jocelyn said, nor of his fierce threats. I hope his wrath will die away in time, and as for tracking out poor Dorothy's sweetheart I doubt he will never be able to do that since no one but herself knows where he came from, nor even his name."

"There, enough prating!" cried my Father sharply, "that little tongue o' thine would talk the birds off the trees. 'Tis a sad state o' things, and the less said the better. Even if no more mischief comes on't, enough has been done to my thinking. There's his Honour out of his right mind—her Ladyship gone to Yorkshire—Master Bilsborough—not as I ever set so much store by him, but still, when all's said and done he's one o' the Family—well, there, he's disgraced and turned out of doors. And as for yon poor wench upstairs, she's not the gainer by it all—I'll say that—but I could wish she had never come among us."

Yet, for all that, when Dorothy came creeping down on the following morning, looking so heavy-eyed and feeling, I doubt not, so heavy-hearted, I could see him soften towards her, though he glanced at her loweringly and scarce returned her greeting. Upon which, pushing aside the mug of new milk which my Mother had just set before her, she leaned forward and clasped his great brown hand in both of hers.

"Do not be angry with me, Gaffer," said she. (She had after the first playfully adopted the title by which my Father was commonly known among us; but the word fell from her lips now in so pathetic a tone that the tears leaped to my eyes.) "Do not be angry with me, Gaffer, I will not trouble you long. I have made up my mind this night to go away from you all. I have done harm enough, God knows—you will be glad to get rid of me!"

Thereupon we set up a great outcry, my Father's voice being loudest of all ; and little Patty jumped from her seat, and ran round the table and caught her round the neck sobbing.

" Oh, no, indeed," said Dorothy, in answer to our entreaties, " indeed, I cannot stay. You have all been so kind to me—my good friends. But I bring sorrow and trouble wherever I go and—oh ! I could never go back to dwell in that accursed place."

Silence fell upon us for a moment, during which we could not but bethink us of all the calamities which had indeed befallen her since she had come to Lychgate ; how she had been persecuted, calumniated, shamed, stoned and well-nigh burned as a Witch—even our poor Sir Jocelyn's unwelcome love had added to her burden.

The remembrance came to me, too, of the terrors to which she had been subjected in her loneliness, and it seemed to me that the hapless creature had been surrounded by enemies from the other world as well as those of flesh and blood creation. Small wonder that she dreaded the place.

" And what do you count on doing, my wench ?" said my Father at last.

" Well," returned she, " all last night I have been thinking, and I fancy I will go to America. I could make shift, I daresay, to get on with my life somehow in a strange world where nobody knew me."

Then we all cried out again, for, said we, America must be a wild place indeed and life must be hard there, else why had Master Bilsborough deemed the fate so cruel which drove him thither ?

" Because he must work for his living, I suppose," answered Dorothy with a little smile, " and I believe he

was never fond of over-exerting himself. But I would like very well to work hard, so that I should have little time for thought."

"Tush, nonsense," cried my Father angrily, "what should a wench like you do yon in the middle o' savages and sich like? 'Tis all very fine this talk o' workin' for your livin', but how do you reckon to do it? There's Brother Waring tells me you have drawn out all that good brass he had laid by for you, and though ye'll maybe get a good price for your wheat," he went on with more animation—"ah, very like ye will, for they tell me a trader from Liverpool is going about the country buyin' up a deal o' corn for export, and yours is as bonny a fieldfull as ever I see—but still, when all's said and done——"

"I have planned it all," she interrupted, "I want you to sell my stock and crops and everything I have, as soon as you can; and I shall also sell my half lottery ticket—oh yes, I want to make the break complete. And then Malachi and I will go away together and never be heard of again."

"That's a nice hearing for your friends, I'm sure," said my Mother with some dudgeon.

And my Father pooh-poohed the whole notion, which he declared to be the most rank folly, and Patty stood casting sorrowful eyes at Dorothy, but saying nothing, and I sought for words wherewith to dissuade her. But just as I opened my mouth to speak them, she jumped up from the table, and clapped her hands to her ears, and ran out of the room, crying that she must have her way or she should go mad.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MRS. DOROTHY COMMITS A TRUST TO ME.

THE strange happenings which I must next relate, followed so closely on each other that I can, with difficulty, disentangle them. Everything seemed to come at once—Sir Jocelyn's abrupt departure, Malachi's accident, and Dorothy's consequent removal to Lychgate, for the love she bore the old man was so great as to conquer her horror of the place ; and from the moment she heard of his fall from the granary, and of the sad plight in which he lay, with so many broken bones and contusions, she would not rest a moment until she had taken her place by his bedside.

Her fears seemed to leave her for the nonce, and, indeed, she was perhaps safer then than she had ever hitherto been in her ruinous abode, for the country people had not forgotten Sir Jocelyn's lesson, and knew better than to molest her.

It was on the evening of the same day on which she had concluded her bargain with the Liverpool merchant, who had bought her entire stock of corn at so high a price, that she sent for me.

Autumn was then full upon us, and the air was damp and chill, and rank with the smell of rotting leaves and sodden grass ; but she awaited me in the garden, having stolen forth for a breath of air while Malachi slept.

There was a very pale and sickly moon that night, I

remember, and the clouds were scudding across it, and when the wind drove them clear of it I saw Dorothy's face, pale, too, as it had been of late, and I saw her eyes large and dark and deep.

"Luke," said she, without any preamble, "Luke, you have often told me that you loved me—was the saying true?"

"Madam," I returned, with all my pulses wildly beating, though I did not for a moment misunderstand her, "I have indeed loved you always—I love you now; I would give my life in your service."

"I do not ask so much as that," said she, "but I want you to undertake what may prove to be a hazardous enterprise. You have heard, perhaps, that I am to get a large price for my wheat; next week the wagons come to fetch the stuff away, and I am to receive payment."

"'Tis a large sum, and you should at once bank it," cried I, "or deliver it to my Uncle for safe keeping. My Father was saying as much to-day."

"No, Luke," said she, "I will hand it over to you. I want you to carry it away at once—a long way—down to the South. I will notify a messenger to meet you at an inn called the Blue Lion, which lies between Tiverton and Exeter, and there you shall deliver up your trust."

"But, in Heaven's name," cried I, "why should you strip yourself like this, when you have need of all the money you can lay your hands on for your own enterprise? Do pray consider——"

"Oh, I have considered everything," she returned, tapping her foot impatiently on the soddened path, and speaking with something of her old spirit. "Surely I must know my own business best. Did I not tell you before that my one object in life was to free myself from the burden of debt which is crushing me to the earth

—to free myself and more than myself: to free a beloved memory.”

“You did tell me something of the sort,” answered I, still hesitating, “but——”

“Oh, if you are afraid to undertake the business, say no more,” cried she. “I will find some other messenger. I myself could very well accomplish the journey if it were not for Malachi. My poor faithful Malachi,” she added, “I do indeed miss him sorely—he has never questioned my will. But I might have known that you would fail me, Luke—you have never yet stood by me in my need.”

Now, though my heart burned at her injustice, I could not but remember—what she seemed like never to forget—that she had indeed called upon me once in vain; but this made her present accusation the more unendurable, and so great was the tumult within me that, when I opened my mouth to reply, I found no words but only a great sob.

And then she melted, laying her hand kindly on my arm and asking my pardon for her cruel speech, and said she knew I would be a faithful henchman, and carry out her errand as competently as Malachi himself.

“And that you may see,” she added, “that I really counted upon you all along, will you send this letter to the post for me to-morrow? There are sure to be some travellers going to Liverpool who will carry it thither. ’Tis to warn the messenger I spoke of to be in readiness to meet you at the place I named. You had best tarry at the inn until he seeks you there. His name is John Dewey. He is a tall, country fellow, dark in complexion, and wearing as a rule a grey frock.”

Here I could not forbear starting, being mindful of that tale in the News paper about the Bishop of Exeter, to whom, as Sir Jocelyn read to us, a certain old obligation

had been repaid by an unknown countryman in a *grey frock*. The moon was clouded over, however, and Dorothy did not notice my agitation ; and I presently made shift to ask her quietly if such grey coats were not in common wear among the country folk in that neighbourhood.

"'Tis likely enough," returned she. "John Dewey nearly always goes thus clad, but if you like to make more sure of your man you may ask him for a sign. Before delivering the packet you shall say this to him: *Where have I fallen? What have I done?* and he will answer: *What is true is safe*. And then you may rest assured that there is no mistake."

"Well," said I, "I'll do it, but it seems to me nonsense. Why shouldn't I say something with a bit of meaning in it?"

"There's meaning enough in what I tell you to say," she replied, sharply. "Heard you ever of such a thing as a family motto? But no—how could you? Well, so that you do my bidding, it matters not."

"Agreed," said I. "I am ready and willing to go on your errand whenever it suits you."

"You must be wary," said she, "for the roads are dangerous and you will be worth robbing, my poor Luke."

"They shall take my life before they take your money," said I.

I thought I saw a shudder pass over her, but 'twas too dark to be sure ; she held out her hand and I kissed it and went my way, promising to hold myself in readiness against the time when she should despatch me.

My blood was leaping at the thought of the enterprise, and indeed I feared the dangers of the road far less than the difficulties I should encounter at home. Would they ever consent to let me set forth on such an expedition? Even if my parents could be persuaded, would my Uncle

Waring agree to allow me to dispose of so much time which was legally more his than mine?

As I plodded through the dripping fields I weighed the pros and the cons in my mind, and finally resolved to keep the plan to myself. The success of my enterprise depended to a large extent upon its secrecy. Better to endure the wrath of my relations than to risk failure.

It is easy to imagine what an added zest this romantic secrecy gave to my preparations for the journey. I fed up Chestnut till the good beast could eat no more; and rode him so gently to and from the town that he was nigh bursting out of his skin with corn and spirits, and plunged and kicked like a mad thing when I mounted him of a morning. I hunted up an old pistol of my Grandfather's and practised at taking aim, on the sly. 'Twas so eaten up with rust as made it like to prove more dangerous to myself than to an opponent, but I took no heed of that, but rubbed it as bright as I could, and myself fixed a fresh flint on the lock—one of a store which I had carefully collected. I also expended some of my small stock of money in ammunition.

This question of money was the one which troubled me most; I had next to none of my own, and durst not ask for any, while the thought of borrowing from Mrs. Dorothy—the only other alternative—was most repugnant to me. However, I need have had no fears on this account, for when the time came she pressed upon me a sum which was more than sufficient for my needs; making it clear to me, with a pretty, gracious eagerness, that since I was acting as her servant and doing her errand it was but right and just she should defray my expenses.

It was on the fifth day, I think, after Dorothy had un-

folded her plan to me, that my Father informed me the wheat had been carried away and the payment made over to its late owner.

"And there she has it in the house," continued he. "If the news gets abroad I'll not answer for its safety. Do, for mercy's sake, my lad, ask thy Uncle Waring to call upon her and persuade her to bank it or suffer him to keep it for her. The house might be broke into any day and she robbed, and as like as not murdered."

"Yes, indeed," said I excitedly. "Would it not be well, Sir, for me to ride to Lychgate very early to-morrow morning before any one is about, and ask her to let me carry the money to my Uncle at once? Every hour that it lies there is a danger to her. If she refuses we can but see what Uncle Waring can do."

I could scarce keep my voice from trembling with eagerness, for this suggestion of mine, if carried out, would much facilitate a plan which had of late formed itself in my mind. My Father's hearty consent was, in consequence, a great relief to me; and I went to bed so full of blissful agitation that I could scarce sleep. The waiting was over and the moment for action had come; never in my life, I think, had I felt so proud or so happy; the spice of danger in the adventure rendered it only the more delightful to me.

Long before dawn I was on my way to Lychgate. I mind when Chestnut and I found ourselves in the open fields I halted and clapped his sleek neck joyfully. "Hey for the road, my lad!" cried I. "We'll carry the thing through, thou and I, and show Mrs. Dorothy that we can be trusted." And then we jogged forward again, the reins hanging loose on Chestnut's neck, for 'twas still so dark I was forced to yield to his guidance.

Now Dorothy's Fleetfoot was, as has been said, own

brother to Chestnut, and though he was inferior to my good horse in many respects, as all who knew could testify, the likeness between the two was so great as to mislead folks who judged from the mere outside. My plan, therefore, was to leave Chestnut stabled at Lychgate and to ride Fleetwood to Upton in his stead, thus sparing my own beast the fourteen miles journey, and keeping him fresh for the night's work. It would be easier to make my own escape from the house on foot than to risk leading out a horse, which I scarce could hope to accomplish silently ; this notion of mine was, therefore, a notable improvement on my first idea, which was to muffle Chestnut's feet in dishcloths that the sound of his hoofs might not be heard upon the pavement. My Father seldom visited the stables after my return in the evening, and I trusted to luck to prevent any one else detecting that I had swopped the two. I had of late attended myself so assiduously to my own nag that Stumpy would not be likely to enter his stall.

"Very well thought out indeed, Luke," said Mrs. Dorothy approvingly, when I unfolded my project to her in the dairy by the dim light of a solitary candle. "I had not given you credit for so much ingenuity."

"Then you will not suffer me to carry those notes to my Uncle Waring?" resumed I, with a grin, for I had repeated my Father's advice to her.

"Alas, no!" said she, in the same strain, "all your persuasions are in vain, my good friend."

"And what must I do about the Gaffer's message to him?" I continued.

"Why, you must certainly deliver it," returned Mrs. Dorothy, still laughing, "but not until late in the day lest the good man should call before to-morrow."

I was so fain to hear her laugh again that, though my

conscience smote me somewhat at the imposition I was practising on my Uncle and the folks at home, I promised gaily to obey her counsel.

"When you are well on your way, Luke," said she, "I will hie me to The Delf and make a clean breast of it. I think your Father will forgive us both. He is so just a man that he cannot but commend my wish to discharge my debts, and he must see for himself how hard it would be for me in my present circumstances to find any other messenger than yourself."

I could not altogether share her confidence, but the thought of my departure was too engrossing to admit of much dwelling on the prospect of my return. I duly delivered my Father's commission to my Uncle just before setting forth for home, but forbore for my own part to urge him to carry it out, feeling much inward satisfaction when the worthy man lamented the impossibility of visiting the lady before the morrow.

"For," said he, "it is now so dark o' nights and the roads are so bogged that I would fear to ride thither after dark. But tell my Brother Forshaw I will call upon Mrs. Ullathorne to-morrow and use my best endeavours to persuade her to listen to reason. These ladies! Dear, to be sure! How foolish they be. The risks the charming creatures run—I only hope the money will be there safe and sound to-morrow."

"'Tis to be hoped so, I'm sure," said I; and then feeling some shame at my own cunning I hastened out of the place and let Fleetfoot take me homewards at as brisk a pace as he chose.

It had been colder all day, and there was just a little frost that night—not enough to make the roads slippery, but serving to take the heaviness from the air and to put a wholesome tingle in one's blood. I stood by the open

window longing for the moment to come when I might with safety set forth.

At last all was silent in the house except the regular trumpeting of my Father's snores, which denoted that he was enjoying his well-earned rest as usual. This, as I knew, was not readily broken : indeed, my Mother often averred that even if the house were afire, nothing short of a bucket of cold water would rouse the Gaffer from his slumbers.

I opened my door and stepped out on the landing ; all was still in Patty's room, and as I thought of her lying so quiet in her little white bed, while I went forth to travel so far and to run so many risks, my heart suddenly melted within me, and I wondered if I should ever look upon her bonny little face again. And I wished I had kissed her when I bade her good-night, and had refrained from sparring with her as I had done all through supper, being anxious to engage her attention lest she might ask inconvenient questions. Holding my boots in my hand I crept across and dropped a kiss upon her doorlatch.

" Good-bye, my wench," says I, under my breath, and then went down the stairs and let myself out very softly.

Once outside I ran at full speed, never slackening till I reached Lychgate.

My good Dorothy was waiting for me there at the gate ; she had actually saddled and bridled Chestnut with her own hands so that not a moment's delay was needful.

" Here are the notes," said she, " one hundred and twenty pounds, sewn up in a leather bag made large and flat that you may carry it the more easily."

I thanked her and placed it in my bosom, under my very shirt ; I liked to feel my precious trust next my flesh itself, that I might be the better assured of its

safety. Dorothy then gave me the money for my own expenses and next inquired if I were provided with firearms. I proudly drew forth the pistol from my belt, and she uttered an exclamation of dismay as she examined it by the light of her lantern.

"'Tis worse than useless, my poor Luke," said she, "and might very well blow your own hand off. No, take this"—and she whipped out her own little pistol. "Take this ; 'tis in good order though so small, and I'll warrant the bullet will go straight. I bethought me you might need it and prepared some ammunition."

She thrust a little store of this into my hand, and though I regretted to make the exchange, for indeed I reckoned I had made a very good job of my old firelock, I bethought me, after all, 'twere as well to leave it with her as it might serve to protect her, if need be, better than the pretty toy which she had bestowed on me. For my own actual needs had I not a good stout oak cudgel by me which would, I doubted not, serve my turn better than any gimcrack popgun ?

"Now may God speed you," said she ; and whether because the words were so solemn, or because I felt it to be the right thing to do, I popped down on my knees beside her as I pressed her hand. And then I jumped up and flung me into the saddle and started off rapidly down the lane. And though in my excitement I had felt no fear in approaching the place, I was glad when I passed the old cross at the corner and had turned into the main road.

The moon was nigh at the full, and the keen air sang in my ears as we stepped along. Chestnut, though he had had no exercise that day, and had eaten his fill of Mrs. Dorothy's oats, knew better than to waste his time in cutting idle capers, but took me along at a

swinging trot which covered the ground in a marvellous way. Indeed, if I had loved my good horse before, I loved and admired him doubly during this journey ; he was so sagacious, so willing and withal so strong. We covered more than two hundred miles in a week, and I protest the fine creature was as eager a traveller on the seventh day as on the first.

The journey which had promised so many vicissitudes and adventures seemed like to progress tamely and safely enough. At Warrington, where I baited on the morning after my departure, I fell in with a worthy Merchant from Liverpool, who was travelling with his Son as far as Gloucester to claim a legacy left him by a relative there. This honest man was so fearful of the dangers of the road that though he carried with him his stout Son and a lusty serving-man, he besought me to bear them company as far as our ways lay together.

"For," says he, "though three travellers may be safe enough, four will present a still better front, and I'll warrant me few footpads would care to come within reach of yon cudgel of yours. As for the gentry who ride a-horseback, I think your fine gelding could distance most of 'em. And Tim yonder has his blunderbuss wherewith to cover our retreat. Ride with us, I pray, Master—'twill be all the safer for you too."

This plan agreed very well with my own notions, for though I had myself been very well pleased to run some risk, it behoved me to be cautious on account of my trust.

We travelled very warily, and though our way took us past Birmingham, Wich, and Worcester, we baited at none of these places, but sought out quiet roadside inns some miles away from any town, where we fed and lodged without exciting comment. I had already informed the head of our party that I was bound for Bristol to visit

my Uncle, a shipowner there, and the tale served my purpose as well as another ; I drank with no one outside our company, and was indeed subjected to but few inquiries, it being taken for granted I formed part of the worthy merchant's train.

We parted at Gloucester, and I pressed onward alone, travelling for the most part by by-paths and proceeding with greater caution even than before.

Fortune seemed to favour me and I journeyed without any untoward adventure until the evening of the tenth day when one befell me which was, God wot, rather more than I bargained for ; and which I must narrate at length and with due precision, for it altered the course of lives far more important than my own.

CHAPTER XXVII.

I AM ROBBED IN BAX WOOD.

BY sunset on the evening of this, the tenth day of my journey, I thought my goal in sight: a few more miles would bring me to the Blue Lion, where I was to meet my man. I forded the river a little below Tiverton, and pursuing the tactics I had of late adopted, proceeded by a bridle-path which followed the banks of the river. Before very long we came to a very pretty wood, and I mind noticing as I trotted along how the ruddy evening light fell upon the boles of the trees, and how, here and there, I caught glimpses of a red and purple sky behind the naked branches.

I could have sung aloud for joy that my mission was so near accomplished, and that Chestnut and I had comported ourselves so well; and as we advanced I fell to imagining the reception I was like to receive on my return. With what gratitude Mrs. Dorothy would press my hand, how she would commend my faithful service and Chestnut's speed and endurance; how eagerly my Parents would question me, what importance I should present in their eyes—above all, what a hero Patty would think me!

I was smiling to myself and actually repeating aloud some foolish words I meant to say to her when, of a sudden, my horse made a violent swerve, and the next moment was thrown back upon his haunches. A light

flashed in my face, and, before I had time to recover from my astonishment, was immediately extinguished. Almost simultaneously a horseman leaped out upon me from the shelter of the trees—indeed I should have bethought me of the danger of journeying in so leisurely a fashion through such a place—in a moment I saw the rim of a pistol within a foot of my face, and I was seized so violently by the throat as to be well-nigh throttled. The other fellow, he who carried the lantern, was meanwhile clutching Chestnut's bridle and forcing him backwards amongst the undergrowth.

It was so dark that I could scarce distinguish the forms of my assailants; indeed in the surprise of the attack I thought little of identifying them, but only how I could best guard my trust; and it hardly struck me as strange that not a word was said on either side, not even the customary, "Stand and deliver!" or, "Your Money or your Life!" I kicked Chestnut sharply, hoping to make him overthrow the footpad, and at the same moment knocked up the pistol with my cudgel, the thought flashing across me as I did so, that the other fellow would certainly fire upon me now, and that all my efforts to protect my treasure would be in vain.

He did not shoot, however, but abandoning his tactics loosed his hold of Chestnut's reins, and while I was struggling with my mounted opponent he nipped round my horse and with a sudden dexterous twist wrenched the cudgel from my hand. My wrist hung nerveless for the moment, but with my left hand I whipped out Dorothy's little pistol and shot at the horseman as he pressed upon me. I made sure I hit him for I heard a muttered word, "S'death!" But indeed the bullet was so small it might have passed through him without doing any serious hurt. I had no time for further resistance,

for almost simultaneously with my futile attempt to dispose of the one assailant, my downfall was accomplished by the other. I vow the fellow was not only as strong as a giant but as nimble as a cat. He caught me round the waist with his great sinewy arms, and my poor distracted Chestnut plunging violently at the same time, I was dragged from the saddle and thrown upon the road.

The big man knelt upon and well-nigh suffocated me, while the other, dismounting, searched rapidly in my pockets and in my bosom.

"Sir," groaned I, "yonder goes my horse ; 'tis the best beast that ever stepped, and my own. You may have him as a free gift if you will but let me go ; for I am bound on important business concerning other folks and not myself."

'Twas very simple of me to have made such a speech, and the highwaymen might well have answered that they would have my money and my horse too, and that I might be thankful for my life ; but they said never a word at all, only the horseman paused a moment in his search, and then, turning to his comrade, made a sign with his hand. The other raising himself a little reached for his lantern, jerking up the slide so that the light flashed forth again. I was pinioned too fast to struggle, but I ceased not to beseech, and to protest, and finally to threaten ; with ever-increasing anger I tried to take note of their appearance so that I might know them again, and if possible bring them to justice. They were both masked and wore their hats drawn down over their brows. The horseman was habited in black and was much more slender in form than his companion, who, I observed, wore a grey frock, the common dress of country folks, as Mrs. Dorothy had said.

Meanwhile the horseman's hands continued to be busy

about my person. Long and slender they were, and curiously white but strong as steel. At last, my shirt being torn apart, my treasure lay revealed, and in a moment was snatched from my keeping.

"What must I do, Master?" said the giant, speaking for the first time.

The other bent forward, answering in so low a whisper that though I strained my ears I could not catch a word. Then mounting he rode off at a gallop.

The other man still sat upon my chest, and pinioned my arms to my sides, though I protested loudly that since they had taken all I had he might in common justice let me go.

Of a sudden and quite unexpectedly he released me and sprang to his feet, and before I had time to follow suit had thrown himself upon Chestnut, who, faithful beast, had not hitherto deserted me for all his fright. But now, maddened by the blows which the usurping rider rained upon him, he set off at a furious pace, and presently I heard a loud plunge and splash—the wretch had forced him into the river. I found my feet at last and, catching up the lantern, ran staggering in the direction they had taken, crying aloud as I went like a madman. I had lost everything—my treasure—my honour—and my horse. I well-nigh think the last seemed to me the greatest calamity of all, for though I would cheerfully have given him—aye, and my life itself—in defence of my sacred trust, that he should be thus robbed from me who had been already doubly stripped was unendurable. Then that they should strike him, the noble, high-spirited fellow, who had never known whip or spur!—I choked with rage so that I could scarce find breath enough to hasten on my way.

I emerged from the wood at last and found myself in

a very dreary and solitary lane, with the river running between me and the high road. Here, proceeding more slowly, and examining the track by the aid of my lantern, I began to search for the place where my poor Chestnut had been forced into the river.

Half-unconsciously, for indeed I scarce knew what I did, I called out his name, and of a sudden, while I was thus engaged, I heard a great splashing a little way off, and straightening myself and raising my light I beheld, to my intense joy, my beloved horse swimming towards me.

Dropping my lantern on the river bank, I shouted aloud—I believe I wept—I know I called to him again in so broken a voice that the poor beast must have found it hard work to recognise it. And when he landed I flung my arms about his dripping neck and kissed him, and fairly danced with joy.

But presently, becoming sober again and even sad, and recalling what I must conscientiously hold a greater loss, I began to consider what I must next do, and to ask myself if it were possible to take any steps to recover the notes of which I had been rifled. Judging from the pace at which the mounted highwayman had departed, it would be worse than useless to urge my tired horse in pursuit of him. There was nothing for it, it seemed to me, but to make my way to the Blue Lion and there await Mrs. Dorothy's messenger, who might perchance be able to advise me.

I mounted, therefore, and putting Chestnut to as brisk a trot as he was capable of, found myself before very long at the hostelry in question.

'Twas a comfortable place of great repute in that part of the world, and under other circumstances I had been cheered by its aspect ; but now I entered the bar with an

air no doubt as doleful as were my spirits, and summoned the Landlord in as melancholy a voice, as though I meant to bid him to my own funeral. But before I had had time to unfold him my sorry plight, I was startled by a great thump on the shoulder, and turning round angrily, for I was in no mood to brook familiarity from strangers, I caught sight of no less a person than Sir Jocelyn Gillibrand himself.

"Luke Wright, by all that's strange!" cried he. "What wind blows you hither, my lad?"

And—"Eh, your Honour!" ejaculated I, "who'd ha' thought of lighting on you so far from home?"

"Why," returned he, with a darkening face, "when a man would fain explore, there's nothing like going to the fountain head. Track a river to its source, my lad, if you would know whence the stream comes. But what adventure brings you here?"

"Oh, Sir Jocelyn," cried I with a groan, the memory of my woes returning upon me, "you may well talk about adventures, for I would fain ha' been without. I have been robbed," I cried, wringing my hands, "robbed in a great wood some miles from here, and all I had took from me. The ruffians even stole my horse, but he came back to me again, though he had to swim the river."

"'Twas Bax Wood, I reckon," cried the Landlord eagerly; he and many more had gathered round to listen to my tale. "I'll go warrant the rogues were hid in the caves there. They used to be much favoured by such gentry—aye, they've sheltered many a bad character, even in my time. You'd have a chance o' catching the rascals very like if you was to go back to look for 'em," he added excitedly.

"But I heard 'em ride off," I returned gloomily. "One

of 'em was mounted on a splendid horse and galloped off Exeter way, and the other, who was on foot when they first beset me, crossed the river on my horse. I know not by what chance it was the poor beast managed to get back to me."

"Well," said the Landlord, scratching his head, "if they be gone, they be gone; but for all that it might be worth your while to search them caves. They might ha' gone back to 'em when they thought you out of the way," he added, ruminatively—"very like they would, for in times past Bax Wood caves was as good as a lodging-house to highway robbers and such like. It do seem a strange thing now," he went on, scratching his chin pensively, "as you should be set upon like that, young Master. We haven't a-had a robber on the high road here this many years now. Nay, not since the French Devil was hanged at Heavitree ten or eleven year ago. Did you ever hear of the French Devil, Sir?" he asked, turning to Sir Jocelyn.

"Not I," returned Sir Jocelyn, "there be devils enough common to all nations, but I never heard of a French one in particular."

"Well, they called him the French Devil," resumed the Landlord in an explanatory tone, "because he was thought to ha' come over in a French fishing smack; aye, and often when he shot his man he'd out wi' some strange word, 'Morbloo' or some such thing, and in complexion he was as black as your Honour's self—craving your Honour's pardon. But I myself reckon he came from—his own place, for there was no knowin' where to have him; one day here, another there, and he'd no more respect for the Quality than the common folk, and 'ud as lief rob a Bishop as a farmer."

"Well, but they hanged him, you say," said Sir Jocelyn

impatiently, "so he's disposed of. They must be clever folks in these parts to catch and hang a Devil."

"Dear, to be sure! Yes, Sir, they hanged him right enough, and his skeleton might long be seen swinging at the cross-roads 'twixt here and Heavitree; folks used to go miles round to avoid passing near the place. 'Twas thought he was as wicked a customer dead as alive, and brought ill luck to all who went a-nigh him. But this year the bones was spirited away—all in a minute, so to speak—there one day and gone the next. As like as not his Master had come and fetched him—and a good job too! I've no likin' for such folks, and I'm sorry to hear there's more of 'em about; for if ye believe me, your Honour, they do a deal of harm to an honest house. The Quality do push on to the big towns instead of baiting at a quiet place like this; and the poor bodies won't stop to have more nor a glass or two, for fear of being overtaken when they be in liquor."

"Come, enough prattle," interrupted Sir Jocelyn. "What say you, Luke? Are we to go and explore these caves?"

"Well, if I was you I'd go and have a look, Sirs," put in the Host, and the bystanders took up the cry warmly.

In spite of the Landlord's condemnation of highway robbers I had some doubts of his sincerity in the matter; and I looked appealingly at Sir Jocelyn, fearing to be despatched on a fool's errand. I had often heard that the country folk favoured these gentlemen of the road, who were indeed frequently good-natured and generous with other folk's money, and were, moreover, rollicking, jovial, dare-devil fellows; and I thought the proposed expedition might be designed to put me off the scent. But Sir Jocelyn clapped me on the back again, and declared he would ride forth with me that minute.

"Let us have fresh horses, Landlord," cried he, "for ours are weary. We shall want four of 'em, for myself and my two servants and this young man; and pray let us have a capable guide who may conduct us to these caves."

"Is it worth while, think you?" said I despondingly. "Might it not be better for me to ride at once to Exeter and make my complaint there."

"And let the rascals get clear away meanwhile?" retorted he. "No, indeed! Come, let us start at once—we can at least explore these hiding-places, and if we draw a blank we may yet come upon their tracks. The footpad at least cannot have proceeded so very far."

"I am truly grateful to your Honour," I returned, "for your kindness in helping me, and I agree 'tis best to set out at once. By the way," said I, turning to mine host, "should a man come asking for me here will you have the kindness to keep him until I return? His name is John Dewey. A country fellow," said I, with as casual an air as I could assume, "I have a little business to transact with him."

"Ah, to be sure, I know him well; he is an honest lad and like to do well in the world, they say. His Mother was woman to a Lady of Quality, and——"

But at this moment mine host was interrupted by the entrance of the ostler, who desired to know which horses should be got ready for the expedition.

During the bustle which ensued, Sir Jocelyn turned to me and again inquired the object of my journey, speaking with the same impatient air I had already noticed.

"'Tis surely new," he added, with a sneer, "that you should be so well worth robbing."

"Oh, Sir Jocelyn," cried I, much agitated, "'tis no money o' mine—you may be sure of that. 'Tis a large

sum in bank notes which, by Mrs. Ullathorne's order, I was to deliver over to her messenger here for the payment of some debts of hers. I think no harm of telling you this much, which is indeed all that I know myself; though by her wish the matter is to be kept as secret as may be."

"So!" said Sir Jocelyn, under his breath, "more mysteries! You are honoured indeed, Luke, to have such confidence placed in you."

And thereupon he fell to pacing the room moodily.

"Nay, but am I not disgraced," I cried piteously, "not to have guarded my trust better? But they were two against me, and though I swear I cared little for their pistols—indeed I had liefer they had shot me—how could I contrive to hold my own against them once they got me down?"

"How, indeed?" he answered absently. "But courage, Luke! We'll track the rascals yet and bring them to justice. I have all but succeeded in my quest," he added with a fierce laugh, "and my company should bring you luck."

We had but just time to swallow a morsel of food before word came that the horses were ready; upon which, mounting in all haste, we set forth upon our search.

The moon had now risen, but being in its last quarter gave not much light. One of the folks from the inn, however, carried a lantern and moreover knew the road well enough to have guided us in the dark; the horses were fresh, the air tingling cold, and, in spite of my anxiety and weariness, I could not help enjoying the swift ride into the night.

In an incredibly short time, as it seemed, we reached Bax Wood, and here Sir Jocelyn called a halt.

"Now," said he, "since we are so numerous a company" (we were six or seven, I think) "I propose that two or three who know the place should go forward quietly to reconnoitre; and the rest of us must hold ourselves in readiness to hasten to their assistance as soon as they have marked the quarry. 'Twere better to surprise than scare these gentry."

The Landlord's Son, who had volunteered to act as our chief guide, and two others from the inn, dismounted, leaving their horses in charge of Sir Jocelyn's servants; and taking with them the lantern, which, however, they were careful to close, disappeared among the trees. We could hear their feet rustling among the dry leaves, a twig now and then snapping; but it was too dark to watch their progress.

In a moment or two all was still save for the creaking of our saddles, with the quick breathing of our horses, which we had indeed pushed to their topmost speed, an occasional stamp of a hoof, the sough of the wind through the leafless boughs—these slight sounds intensified the stillness and seemed to quicken our almost breathless expectation. All at once we heard a shout and then another, and then the rush of feet apparently hurrying along the path by which our scouts had disappeared; and presently the light of the lantern flashed out among the trees, bobbing hither and thither amid a struggling mass of advancing figures.

"They've got one of 'em anyhow!" cried Sir Jocelyn, raising himself in his stirrups. "Run and help them, somebody! The fellow seems to be fighting hard."

I sprang from my horse, throwing the reins to the man nearest me, and rushed to meet the group. By the unsteady light I could just make out a tall, burly figure who, pinioned and half-throttled though he was, was still

making a gallant fight with knees and elbows in the endeavour to release himself. One glance showed me that he was masked and that the colour of his coat was grey. In an instant I had thrown myself upon him ; and shouting and huzzaing, and it must be owned swearing not a little, his captors soon reduced him to helplessness. In another moment his hands were bound tightly behind him, and two of the stoutest of his conquerors, taking each an arm, prepared to drag him towards the rest of our party, when the fellow, catching sight of me, cried out earnestly for a word with me before the matter went further. All his fierceness seemed to have deserted him, and he spoke in so lamentable a tone that my heart had been touched had I not been so wroth with him.

"Speak with you indeed !" cried I. "Where is my money, sirrah ? I doubt your comrade has carried it off far enough out of my reach. Nay, but I'll have justice done on you since I have caught you. In Exeter Gaol shall you lodge this night !"

"Aye, aye !" cried one of the inn folks. "And swing before the month is out, very like."

The wretched creature groaned, and again turned his masked face towards me, imploring me to speak with him.

I stepped towards him and bent my head to his mouth.

"Put your hand into my breast, Master," whispered he, "and you will find the money there safe enough—all the notes—every one. I—I meant not such harm as you think. Oh, Sir, speak a word for me ! Hark ye !" Throwing back his head he paused for a minute, and I could see his eyes gleam through his mask, and then advancing his lips he said very slowly : "*Where have I fallen ? What have I done ?*"

"*What?*" cried I, hardly able to believe my ears, for the words were those by which I myself should have tested Mrs. Dorothy's messenger.

"Listen again, Master," gasped he, and immediately gave the countersign, "*What is true is safe*".

Searching in his bosom as he had directed I easily found the notes, and was beginning to count them when, at a shout from the road, the men, eager to show their prisoner, took hold of him again and hauled him away before I had time to assure myself that I had indeed secured all I had lost.

They had pushed me on one side; but I hastened in their wake, dizzy with astonishment. How could this be? Who could have tampered with one on whose fidelity Mrs. Ullathorne placed such implicit reliance? Poor wretch! Well, since he had restored my money I would willingly let him go.

But I reckoned without Sir Jocelyn, who was, as I have said, in a savage mood that night. The prisoner was searched by his orders and unmasked roughly enough; and while by the light of the lantern I counted the notes, which he had had the precaution to divest of their wrapper, the others crowded round to stare at their luckless captive.

And then—"Why, it is John Dewey!" cried one. "John Dewey, as I am a living sinner! La! John, however came 'ee to be led away like this?"

"Oh, I can't tell!" returned poor John, with a sob. "'Tis the first time I ever meddled wi' anything o' the kind. Pray, pray let me go! Young Master has got his money and nobody's the worse. Let me go, Sir, and I'll swear——"

"Not so fast!" cried Sir Jocelyn sternly. "How came the money in your possession when, according to

this young man's account, your comrade rode away with it? We'll hold you fast, my lad, till we catch your crony. He can't be far off, I'm certain. Let us search the wood, boys, and find out if this Gentleman is not lying concealed somewhere."

Thereupon honest John Dewey—I must even call him so, for in spite of his recent doings I protest I never saw a more open countenance than that dark, scared one of his—honest John Dewey, I say, immediately uplifted his voice and sent out a great cry into the darkness.

"Look to yourself!" shouted John Dewey.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PLUME OF SEVEN FEATHERS.

SCARCE had John Dewey's ringing shout died away than the rapid thud of hoofs fell upon our ears, evidently galloping not from, but towards us ; and ere we had time to marvel what this could portend a horseman dashed into our midst.

A scene of wild confusion ensued ; some of our men fell back, screaming out in terror that there was a whole gang of robbers, and that we should all be murdered. The led horses plunged violently and, one or two escaping, rushed down the road ; the sharp crack of a pistol added to the general alarm, and one of the fellows who had been holding Dewey reeled and fell. The other, infected by the prevailing terror, loosed his captive and dropped the lantern, the light being extinguished in the fall. Then all was confusion, indeed, for even the moon was partly veiled by clouds. As I stood in the midst of the struggling mob I heard the prisoner's voice in my ear : " For the Lord's sake, Master, free my hands ! I could get clear away if I had the use of them ! "

I had out my knife in a moment and cut the rope which bound his wrists ; and diving, as it seemed, among the legs of the horses, the poor fellow made good his escape ; his retreat was rendered the more easy by the fact that his accomplice chose this moment to fire another

shot, which still further alarmed the already panic-stricken mass of men and horses.

Then I heard Sir Jocelyn's voice raised high in wrath and contempt.

"You d——d cowards! Here we are seven to one and not a man dare stand up. Luke Wright—Ho, Luke, you at least I can count on. Lend us a hand here! Come and help me, I say!"

I fought my way to his side; in mad panic our own men were for barring my progress, but by laying about me lustily I cleared a road for myself, and presently I came to the spot where Sir Jocelyn, still on horseback, wrestled with the highwayman. Catching at the rein of the robber's rearing horse, I brought its forefeet to the ground, and then, immediately making an upward leap, I seized its rider by the collar and dragged him from his seat. Then, bearing him backwards, I fair flung myself upon him, keeping him down by the sheer weight of my body, in the same fashion as John Dewey had used myself a little while before.

"Now then! A light here!" commanded Sir Jocelyn. "Have ye not come to your senses yet, you fools? There is but one man, I say, and we have got him down. The greatest poltroon of you all need not fear now. A light, I say!"

"'Tis my man," I cried, infected by his excitement. "I'll swear 'tis the man who robbed me. Will no one bring a light that we may look at him?"

The hubbub subsiding presently I heard the scraping of flint and steel, and at length one of Sir Jocelyn's servants hastened forward with a lantern.

The silence of expectancy had succeeded the tumult of a little while before, and the flame showed me faces no longer terrified, but eager and curious. I saw, too,

that Sir Jocelyn sat very still upon his now quiet horse, though one hand yet clutched the reins of his adversary's steed.

All these things flashed upon me simultaneously, but I scarce took note of them at the time, being as eager as any to identify my prisoner.

"'Tis he, for sure!" cried I, with all the triumph of the conqueror, "for here on the neck is the very wound I gave him!"

Indeed I had marked upon its whiteness a little trickle of blood.

"Unmask the wretch!" commanded Sir Jocelyn, "and let us see if any here can identify him."

I was about to obey when I felt the helpless form beneath me move slightly, and the head, which was the only portion of his person over which my captive had control, was shaken meaningly. As I gazed I saw the lips form the word "No!"

And then, I knew not why, a chill fell upon me, and I sat gazing downwards at my victim as if fascinated. His hat had fallen off, and, between the handkerchief, which bound his head, and the crape mask, I caught a glimpse of a high brow which, like the neck, was of extraordinary whiteness; and just behind the ear a lock of hair had escaped from the black folds—hair which when the light fell on it gleamed like gold.

"Well," exclaimed Sir Jocelyn impatiently, "what are you staring at? Unmask the fellow immediately, I say; or must I dismount and pull off that black rag myself?"

I came to myself with a start, and though I dismissed the notion which had suddenly crossed my brain as absurd and fantastic, I nevertheless resolved that the fellow should keep his privacy at least for the present.

"Nay, Sir Jocelyn," said I, "I think 'twere best to

put off the inquiry till we convey our prisoner to a more private place. After all, what matter his looks since we have caught him. I propose we should carry him to the inn immediately, and there you and I can talk with him alone. There may be after all some mistake," I added, somewhat hesitatingly, and with my eyes still fixed on that gleaming lock.

"Mistake!" cried Sir Jocelyn with an oath, "have we not caught the miscreant red-handed? And pray, Master Luke, how come you to speak so glibly of *you and I*. You and I, forsooth!"

"Well, your Honour," I returned stoutly, "'twas I as was robbed and 'twas I as got him down—I doubt I've the best right to look into the matter—and to my mind 'tis foolish to dally asking questions here when we might do the same in a warm room wi' plenty o' lights to see by."

"There's some sense in that!" cried Sir Jocelyn with a laugh. "Come then, set the fellow on his horse again; and since you are so anxious to prove your right to him, keep watch over him yourself till we get to the Blue Lion."

I released my prisoner of my weight and, assisting him to rise, led forward his horse. Before mounting he paused a moment, making an imperative sign with a long slender hand: he evidently desired me to hold his stirrup. The gesture was familiar to me; I started violently, and before obeying bent forward to examine the horse more closely. Just behind the shoulder I descried a small white patch about the size of a shilling.

I vow I could have fallen to the earth, but that Sir Jocelyn, who had been talking angrily to those about him, now called out impatiently to know why I tarried so long.

"Why," said he, "these fools have let the other ruffian escape. We have made a sorry business of this. A round half-dozen of us and could not keep hold of two men, one of 'em unarmed. Well, two of ye must stay and search the place for him; and you fellow ride on with my servant, yon, who is making such a to-do about his wound; he'll not die of it, I dare swear, since 'tis but in the leg. Come, Luke, they've brought back your horse for ye. Into the saddle, man, and let your prisoner do the same; he shall ride between us, and John can go in front with the lantern."

I stooped again to hold the stirrup, breathing in an agonized whisper the while: "Master! can it be you?"

And the answer came coldly, as he sprang into his seat: "Yes; it is I!"

So great was my anguish and confusion of mind that for the first few minutes of our ride I scarce knew what went on around me; though I dimly comprehended that Sir Jocelyn was jibing at me for my politeness to the highwayman, and desired to know if I would give him my hand when he mounted the steps to the gallows. These last words struck like a knife to my heart. The gallows!—I had brought him to this! I had tracked him, captured him, delivered him up—my gallant Master—to whom I had sworn eternal love and fidelity. What must he think of me? Yet how could I ever have guessed! The whole affair was indeed mysterious, and my bewilderment and anxiety increased as we advanced.

I glanced with eyes dim with anguish to where he sat erect on his noble horse, the lines of his slender, graceful figure showing clear by the light which John carried at his saddle-bow; and I resolved to free him at any cost.

We soon left the wood behind, and the road lay before us following the river with many curves. This river

seemed to me to offer my Master his only chance of flight ; if he could swim or ford it, he, who doubtless knew the country well, could make a dash for safety ; on the other side he might outdistance his pursuers. But how to gain sufficient time for him to accomplish this ?

Fortune seemed to favour my secret prayers, for I suddenly observed that Sir Jocelyn's horse had picked up a stone. I called out to warn him of this fact, at the same time riding behind our prisoner, and bringing my horse close to his Honour's.

"I'll have it out in a minute, Sir Jocelyn," said I, "if you will but hold my nag ;" and before he had time to protest I had dismounted and was busy hammering at the stone in question. If truth be told I made no great effort to free the hoof of the poor beast, but rather endeavoured to jam the stone more firmly in.

Sir Jocelyn, however, had clutched my Master's reins, holding them tight in his left hand while his right grasped his own and those of my horse. John had meanwhile gone forward with his lantern, so that I had but the light of the moon to assist me in my task.

"Make haste !" said Sir Jocelyn impatiently. "Do you mean to keep us here all night ?"

"No, indeed," I returned, "but I don't seem able to get at the stone here—I'll try the other side."

And I went round between Sir Jocelyn and my Master, and once more lifted up the horse's hoof, watching all the while out of the corner of my eye to see if John had yet vanished round the curve of the road. Then, just as Sir Jocelyn began to swear at me for my clumsiness, I twitched my Master's reins out of his slackened grasp, crying out loudly : "Fly, Sir, fly ! Escape while you can ! Try the river !"

I threw myself upon Sir Jocelyn, endeavouring to un-

horse him ; but he was as powerful a man as I, and, moreover, his position gave him an advantage over me. In a moment he shook himself free of me, and whipping out his sword cut me with it sharply over the arm which still clutched his bridle ; then, as I perforce loosed my hold, he jerked a pistol from his belt and pointed it at me.

"I have a bullet for thy heart, Luke," cried he, "if thou hast a mind to play traitor again. Art mad, man, or what is the meaning of this?"

My Master, who had taken no advantage of the opportunity I had made for him, now put in a word very quietly.

"'Twould be indeed folly," said he, "to attempt to escape now, but I thank you for your goodwill, Friend."

Sir Jocelyn looked from him, as he sate so composedly in the saddle, to me clasping my wounded arm, which indeed burned furiously and from which the blood was dripping.

"I should know that voice!" said he. "What! can it be that this chance has led me to my own quarry? Luke, my good lad, I'll not delay the inquiry until we reach the inn; I'll identify the prisoner here—John, come back; John, I say, come back! Sirrah, hold up the lantern," he cried as the man came lumbering back, "hold it up high. Now, Sir," turning to my Master, "do me the favour to unmask."

My Master bowed, and with seeming carelessness removed at once the mask and the kerchief which bound his head, so that his long fair locks fell about his face. He was smiling and seemed quite impassive.

Sir Jocelyn took a long look at him, and then, turning to John, desired him to ride on, but to remain within call.

"A useless precaution, Sir Jocelyn," cried my Master quietly. "I have no intention of endeavouring to escape. 'Tis Fate I believe which has brought us together."

"Fate, indeed!" returned Sir Jocelyn, and I could hear his voice shake with passion—whether exultation or fury I could not divine. He loosed my Master's reins, however, of which he had again possessed himself, and we rode forward in silence, the burning in my arm becoming almost unbearable, and the hot blood soaking into my sleeve. But I cared little for the pain and felt no fear concerning myself, absorbed as I was in dread of what might be my Master's doom.

A light breeze arose, driving the clouds from the pale moon, and I saw that while my Master rode with the same careless ease as before, looking neither to right nor to left, Sir Jocelyn's figure was turned towards him and he moved not his eyes from his face.

All at once he broke silence.

"Since when," said he, "has it pleased you to turn Highwayman, Mr. ——?"

He gave my Master a name which I had never hitherto heard, and which I forbear to set down, for indeed it was one of the greatest in England—one to swear by in the South; and since my experience hath proved it safer to avoid giving offence to the Great, I deem it best to use discretion in this matter—but 'twas a very noble name.

My Master laughed lightly.

"Why," said he, "you will scarce believe me if I say 'tis my first offence."

"I would believe you if you said 'twould be your last," returned Sir Jocelyn grimly. "Such freaks as these lead to the gallows."

"That may very well be," returned my Master, "and yet in my case I hardly think it."

"Did we not catch you red-handed—did you not fire upon us twice?" thundered the other. "Zounds, Sir, you even carry upon your person the proofs of your guilt."

My Master laughed again, and raising his hand negligently touched the spot where my tiny bullet had grazed his neck; then still laughing he drew forth from his bosom the empty bag which had encased Mrs. Dorothy's notes.

"Proofs indeed!" said he. "Honest Luke can swear to them. Yet I doubt if you will get them to hang a man of my Quality even for the public good."

"S'death!" cried Sir Jocelyn, and leaning forward he once more caught my Master's reins, forcing his horse to halt. "I care not a snap of my fingers for the public good. I have a private quarrel with you, and mean to do justice upon you, either with my own hand, or through the instrumentality of the Law. I tracked you to this neighbourhood for no other purpose than to avenge myself upon you."

"And pray, Sir Jocelyn Gillibrand, how did you manage to track me?"

"Why, by means of a trifle of a love-token which was innocently shown me by one we both know. Sir, when a man is bent on such deeds as that which you have but just accomplished, 'twere as well he let not trinkets engraved with his family crest lie within reach of his enemy's eyes. What were easier than to journey to the country where the Plume of Seven Feathers is as well known and as much honoured as the Lion Passant?"

My Master sate as though turned to stone, and Sir Jocelyn continued violently:—

"Aye, by Heaven, there is Justice in this! 'Twas she herself who unwittingly put me on the scent; 'twas her messenger whom you robbed upon the road; 'twas her

money of which you rifled him. Providence has delivered you into my hand, and I'll have no mercy on you. Despicable wretch!" exclaimed Sir Jocelyn, his voice trumpeting out the words like a clarion. "What! you think to go unpunished because of the name you bear? The more shame for you," he went on with ever-increasing wrath, "if you bear a noble name—it does but dishonour you the more in my eyes. How could I fail to scorn a man who could so shame the good blood in his veins!"

"Come, Sir, enough of this!" cried the other impatiently, "since you have a quarrel with me let us settle it here and now. 'Tis not the first time we have crossed swords without formalities."

"Nay," returned Sir Jocelyn, with a sudden deadly calm, to my mind more terrible than his previous violence, "not so fast, Sir, I beg. My purpose is to carry you first to the North—yes—to Lychgate Hall itself, that the Lady who scorned me for your sake may feast her eyes upon you. 'Twas you, Sir, who filched my bride from me—she shall learn that you thought it no disgrace to plunder a poor yokel of money not his own. When she hath learnt what manner of man you are I'll rid the world of you, Sir, by one means or another."

"Take me to her!" cried my Master, as I must ever call him; and all at once the two seemed to change natures, he becoming the more fiery as Sir Jocelyn grew cold. "Take me to her. Aye, 'tis best so. Let her see me by all means, and judge for herself of the pass to which she has brought me!"

"It wanted only this!" sneered Sir Jocelyn. "Truly this is the last touch. To cast the blame of your misdeeds upon her. Oh, 'twas well said—a plausible tale indeed! 'Tis her fault that she should be robbed of her

own money—oh,” he cried, suddenly breaking out into fury again, “the world will be well rid of such carrion !”

“Sir Jocelyn Gillibrand,” broke out my Master, his eyes seeming to shoot forth flames, as I had seen them do once or twice before in the extremity of passion, “Sir Jocelyn Gillibrand, because I am your prisoner, does that give you the right to insult me? I vow ’tis past endurance. Dismount, Sir, and draw !” he exclaimed, leaping from the saddle and whisking out his sword. “Draw and defend yourself! For, by Heaven! you shall pay for these outrages !”

Sir Jocelyn touched his horse with his heel so that it curvetted aside, and cried out commandingly, again calling my Master by his name.

“Put up your sword, Mr.—,” said he, “we cannot settle our differences thus even if there were light enough to see by. Indeed, Sir, I must consider whether I will consent to cross swords with you. But I did wrong to insult a man as defenceless as you have now become.”

The moonlight glanced upon the barrel of a pistol which he drew from his holster.

“You are at my mercy, you see,” said he, “advance a step and you are a dead man. I have but to whistle and my folks will come up and disarm you. But get to your saddle again—I will not have recourse to such measures unless you force me to them.”

My Master, after a pause, lowered his blade, sheathed it slowly and remounted again. His handsome head drooped upon his breast. I understood that his spirit quailed, not with the fear of death or danger, but at the slur upon his honour which he was unable to avenge. I guessed that for a moment he had been tempted to make an onslaught upon Sir Jocelyn at the risk of his own life, but had been withheld by some inward consideration

stronger even than his anger. No one spoke after this until, as we approached the inn, my Master, turning to his captor, craved in a few words his permission to resume his disguise, and Sir Jocelyn as briefly granted it.

We dismounted in the stableyard, and Sir Jocelyn immediately ordered a coach and post-horses.

"We do not ride, then?" inquired my Master.

"No," returned the other fiercely, "we could not make speed enough on horseback. We must travel day and night."

My Master patted Star's neck a moment without replying; and then turning to the ostler desired him to take good care of his horse, which should presently be sent for, when all who contributed to its good estate should be rewarded. He slipped a couple of gold pieces into the man's hand as he spoke, and tossed a handful of silver among the stableboys who crowded round.

"Aye, to be sure, Master," returned they, as though with one accord, "we'll take good care of him."

"Good treatment and no questions asked," added the ostler.

"And what about my horse?" said I to Sir Jocelyn, who stood by, impatiently tapping the pavement with the toe of his riding-boot. "He is already exhausted and could not in any case keep pace with your coach if you bait not day or night."

"What does it matter to me if he be tired or not?" he returned, almost brutally. "You can take your own time about returning home."

"Nay, but I must go with you," I murmured, making so free in my eagerness as to clutch him by the sleeve. "You must take me, your Honour—indeed you must. I have been too much concerned in this matter," I went on desperately, "not to have a right to see it out."

"Why, then, you shall!" he answered, but speaking more after the fashion of one who utters a threat than confers a kindness. "You shall be present at the end, Luke Wright. Indeed, I shall have need of your testimony, but see you make no more attempts to play the traitor."

"Oh, Sir," I broke forth, "I like not that word—and have not deserved it. Yet Mrs. Dorothy herself will very like taunt me with the same when she finds I have so ill done her errand. But God knows I have done my best and tried to be faithful."

The grief in my voice touched him, I suppose, for he caught me by the hand and wrung it, saying very kindly : "Well, I believe you, my lad ; though why you should have sought to favour this stranger more than myself puzzles me—seeing that the man hath done you such grievous wrong, too. But we'll speak no more on't. Mr. — is sworn to make no attempts at escape, so I trow you may ride in the coach with us without harm to my project. As for your precious horse," he added with a smile, "my man Tom shall ride him quietly home as soon as his wound be healed."

My Master had taken no part in this colloquy, but stood by quietly awaiting his captor's pleasure ; and on the latter now desiring him very courteously to enter and partake of some refreshment, he inclined his head and stepped on before him, as though he had been an honoured guest.

Just as we were about to enter the house, the Landlord's Son and his companion, who had remained behind to search for John Dewey, came clattering up to announce that they could find no trace of him. I doubt they had not made any very careful examination of the place, partly through fear of falling in with others of a possible

gang, partly because of a certain wish to abet the man's escape.

They immediately became the centre of an excited group, to whom they related their adventures with much zest and spirit. These good folks indeed had as yet heard no details of the enterprise, Tom having been assisted indoors by his companion of the ride and John, and no one daring to question Sir Jocelyn and myself. But tongues now wagged freely, and I heard the name of John Dewey passing from mouth to mouth. My Master, who still stood upon the doorstep while Sir Jocelyn parleyed with the Landlord, now caught me by the arm.

"Put them off the scent if you can," he whispered. "John is my Foster-brother and Malachi's Son. I shall never forgive myself if I bring him to harm."

When Sir Jocelyn had conveyed his prisoner into the house, I went forth into the yard with as careless and swaggering an air as I could assume.

"What is that I hear you say?" cried I. "John Dewey, indeed! A likely tale! Why, John Dewey is my good friend and was to meet me here if I tarried long enough. You remember how I told you I awaited him? Do you think he would fall upon me on the road to rob me of what I meant to hand over to him fairly?"

The men looked at each other dubiously.

"Well, it do seem a queer thing," said one, "but I reckon 'twas John Dewey for all that."

"Pooh! nonsense!" cried I. "You should think it shame to take an honest man's character away. You are making a mistake, I say, and the only way you can make up for it is by drinking my good friend John's health."

With that I drew one of Mrs. Dorothy's remaining gold pieces from my pocket and spun it in the air.

"Think again ; it was never John Dewey. Why, all you Devon men are as like as so many crows."

"There's something in that," returned they, staring at the coin and laughing knowingly.

"There's a deal in that !" said I. "Come, drink his health, and if he calls to see me to-morrow tell him I could not wait, being forced unexpectedly to return whence I came."

"We'll tell him to be sure," returned they ; and one of them, catching the coin I tossed to him, set it in his eye and grinned at me. Then the ostler calling out that he must have help in harnessing the horses to the travelling-coach, the group dispersed, and I went indoors to have my wound dressed, feeling a little less heavy at heart since I had saved at least one of my assailants from the consequences of his folly.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MAN TO MAN.

How shall I describe the journey that ensued? I vow 'twas like a nightmare, this forced progress in the ramshackle coach that halted but a few minutes at each baiting-place, and then went forth again at the topmost speed which the state of the roads would permit; jolting, swaying, till our bones ached, and the throbbing of my wound became agonizing. Ever in my ears the clatter of the galloping horses, the rumbling of the wheels, the creaking and the straining of the ancient vehicle; ever before my eyes those two stern faces, Sir Jocelyn's fierce, implacable, lowering; my Master's very pale, with set lips and keen blue eyes gazing, as it seemed, into the immeasurable distance. Even when night came and I could no longer see them, I felt the presence of the hatred betwixt the two—it seemed to me that they never slept, but remained glaring into the darkness, each with rage consuming his heart. When the day broke again the dim light still showed me the two figures side by side, motionless, speechless, and each thirsting for vengeance on the other. I myself sometimes fell into a feverish doze, and wakened with ever-increasing pain and weariness; towards the end of our journey I began to be somewhat light in the head, and would start up, crying aloud for my Mother or Patty, and once or twice I fancied that the little wench sate beside me, and the

thought gave me infinite comfort, though I never could induce her to speak.

As we advanced, Sir Jocelyn's eagerness seemed ever on the increase, and when we halted he would scarce give us time to stretch our cramped limbs or to swallow a mouthful of food before we must on again. He was good enough, nevertheless, to bathe and dress my wound occasionally, for this grew ever more and more painful, and the fever in my blood hourly increased.

"You should be in your bed, lad," he said to me once, kindly; but even while I gazed at him, with dazed eyes, he swore at the Landlord for his delay in serving us, and urged the postboys to greater haste in harnessing the fresh horses.

My Master meanwhile submitted to his will and made no protest at the impetuosity of our journey, though I could see that he was broken with fatigue.

At Warrington, however, where we baited for the last time, and whence we were to set forth on horseback, the condition of the roads rendering it absolutely impossible for the coach to proceed, he insisted on a longer halt.

"I must be shaved," said he, "and make a change of linen. Our host will procure me some. In an hour, Sir Jocelyn, I shall be at your service."

"What!" cried Sir Jocelyn. "You would make yourself fine for your Lady Love, I suppose?"

"I should think it showed her little respect were I to appear before her in my present plight," returned the other.

So, while Sir Jocelyn fumed and chafed, my Master made a careful toilet in the neighbouring chamber, and emerged thence as well appointed as though he had been bidden to a feast. His hair in particular, I remember, was combed back, and tied as usual with a black ribbon,

and his face, new shaven, looked more like itself, in spite of its intense pallor, than it had done since the beginning of our journey.

Sir Jocelyn, still in his disordered dress, with his four days' beard upon his chin and his periwig unkempt, eyed him with the glare of a wild beast ; then with a fierce laugh :—

“A pretty spectacle!” quoth he. “I vow you could scarce make yourself more gallant if you were on the way to the gallows ; and I believe 'tis the fashion with you Gentlemen of the Road to be very fine on such occasions.”

My Master passed out before him, carrying his head high, and seeming as though he scarce heard him ; and we mounted our beasts and set forth anew.

My Master and he rode abreast, and John and I brought up the rear. I could have wept aloud as my weary eyes fell once more on the familiar landscape, with its flat fields, and woods, and dykes, and the glimpses now and then as we skirted the sandhills of the river's mouth and the craft at anchor there. I reeled in the saddle often, and would have fallen had it not been for John, who propped me up again, and, indeed, journeyed for the last mile supporting me with his arm. He was much puzzled with all these doings, honest fellow, but comforted himself for the fatigue of our hasty journey by the thought that he would certainly go to see the hanging of our prisoner at Liverpool.

It was almost dusk by the time we reached Lychgate. The outlines of the sinister old house were scarce visible in the gloom of the November evening ; but a dim light shone forth from Malachi's room and another from the dairy, and we could see a shadow flit back and forth behind the windows of this latter room. We dismounted, as usual, at the gate, Sir Jocelyn desiring John to take

charge of his horse and striding on in advance of us, while my Master paced in his rear, leading his own horse until he came close to the house, when he too abandoned the reins to John. I dropped mine also, and the poor beast, which was patient enough, like most nags of its quality, walked obediently in the wake of its fellows to the stableyard.

Sir Jocelyn and his prisoner marched abreast towards the entrance, not of the wing usually inhabited by Mrs. Dorothy, but of that which contained the dairy, where we had seen her figure flitting to and fro. I followed, striving to gather together all forces of mind and body to meet the impending crisis.

Mrs. Dorothy at the sound of our footsteps hastened to set open the dilapidated door, holding a light on high, and starting back with a cry when Sir Jocelyn hailed her. She did not at first identify his companion, but he, stepping forward, breathed her name and almost simultaneously kissed her. Then Sir Jocelyn, with a harsh exclamation, pushed himself between them, and I, from the rear, saw Mrs. Dorothy gaze from one to the other terror-stricken, her eyes dilated, her lips moving but making no sound.

Then my Master spoke very quietly.

"We cannot discourse here in the passage," said he, "shall we not enter yonder room, Cousin? Sir Jocelyn Gillibrand desires to relate to you a certain adventure in which he hath recently taken part, and which he thinks may interest you."

"*Cousin!*" exclaimed Sir Jocelyn loudly, as he followed in their wake; for Dorothy had immediately led the way to the dairy with my Master by her side.

"Cousin!" he repeated still more emphatically. "Does this Gentleman speak truth, Madam?"

Dorothy, who looked and moved like a sleep-walker, gazed back at him as though scarce comprehending his question, and my Master answered for her, still very quietly.

"Our Mothers were two Brothers' Children. But let us to your tale, Sir Jocelyn—the Lady must be all eagerness to hear it."

"Madam," said Sir Jocelyn, bowing very low, "if this be true I grieve the more for the news I have to give you. It is a tale of dishonour and disgrace."

The blood rushed to her pale face at this and full consciousness seemed to come back to her. She drew herself up and turned to him haughtily.

"Sir Jocelyn," said she, "I have no desire to hear your tale. I have often warned you of the cloud of shame which overhangs me; and I cannot but think it an outrage that, having set yourself to worm out my secret, you should taunt me with it now."

"Heaven grant me patience!" cried Sir Jocelyn, flushing hotly. "Am I going mad? How can it be possible, Madam, that you should be aware of the highway robbery committed within this week by your Kinsman there, upon the person of your own messenger, who was plundered, despite his resistance, of the money you had yourself entrusted to him? Zounds, I believe I am distracted! You cannot be all thieves together, sure——"

He broke off, for Dorothy with a scream rushed towards my Master, whose arm she seized.

"'Tis false!" she cried. "It must be false. Say you did never such a thing!"

My Master laughed, a somewhat bitter laugh, and put her gently from him.

"But indeed I did, fair Coz!" said he. "Since you would not let me raise you I was resolved to stoop. The

cloud which rests on you hath now covered me. For the stain on your scutcheon, there's an equal blot on mine. If I live you can no longer hold aloof—but Sir Jocelyn swears that I must die.”

Dorothy wrung her hands, looking from one to the other, and continuing to moan 'twas false, 'twas false, and she should never believe it. And then my Master drew forth the leather case which she had made with her own hands, and which she could not but see was empty.

“And,” said he, “I have somewhere upon my neck the scar made by a tiny bullet fired in self-defence by valiant Luke yonder.”

She took the wallet from him, turning it over as though unable to believe the evidence of her senses.

“’Tis indeed empty!” she said, “yet I will never believe that you took those notes. ’Tis a jest, a wicked, cruel jest——”

“’Tis grim earnest,” put in Sir Jocelyn, fiercely; he had been standing by, chafing, during this colloquy, being irritated beyond measure at my Master’s airy manner. I, who knew the latter better, could perceive that this seeming carelessness cloaked a deep-seated bitterness, and that his anger, though controlled and quiet, was to the full as real as Sir Jocelyn’s own.

His blue eyes sparkled now as he answered: “’Tis no jest, my love. You drove me from you once, and again, and yet again; you escaped from me, choosing to masquerade here like a farm wench rather than share my lot. You thought I could never track you, but you forgot that Malachi’s Son was my Foster-brother and very good friend. What more likely indeed than that each time he was summoned to do your business he should communicate with me? Last spring, for instance——”

"Ah," she cried, groaning and covering her face with her hands.

"When I pursued you," he went on sternly, "you again twice denied me. I resolved to pay you back in your own coin—to take upon myself the same disgrace by reason of which you cast me off. Hearing from John Dewey of Luke's errand, I waylaid him on the road, plundered him, as Sir Jocelyn told you——"

"But surely, surely," interrupted Dorothy, "you never meant to keep or spend that money? I will not believe it—you cannot make me believe it. I charge you by your love for me to tell me the truth."

"If you put it thus, I cannot deny you," said he, with a smile of real tenderness. "What could I want with your money, my sweet? I took it, indeed, but returned it to John within the hour, desiring him to carry out your orders as he would have done had Luke met him in the appointed way. I believe, however, that being panic-stricken he hath since restored it to Luke Wright, so that if your behests were not carried out you are at least no poorer. I meant to send this bag to you that you might see how easy 'twas to play highwayman. Had you still proved obstinate I would have taken to the road in earnest. Oh, never protest! A desperate man will do desperate things; if you had foiled me again I must have punished you—and I vow I am sick of my life!"

"Then, Sir," cried Sir Jocelyn violently, "you shall be eased of it. I know not what to make of this story of yours, but I will not be balked of my vengeance."

"Oh, Sir Jocelyn," cried Dorothy, clasping her hands, "spare him! I pray you, spare him! If he has been brought to this pass it is my fault. I vowed I would never let him do injustice to his noble name by wedding me."

"But since you come yourself of the same stock," interrupted Sir Jocelyn, the torrent of his wrath suspended for the moment, as it were, by his amazement.

"We are of the same blood, indeed; but—well, you shall know my secret, though I hoped to preserve it to my death. The remains that lie yonder in that grave beside the Chapel are those of my Father, who was hanged at Heavitree in Devonshire for highway robbery and murder."

Sir Jocelyn uttered an exclamation and then stood staring at her.

"But how came your Mother to wed such a man?" he stammered at length.

"'Twas after her death he took to evil courses. She died in giving me birth, and I—I—oh, Sir Jocelyn, I loved my Father, and even now I cannot hear him condemned. He was maddened by sorrow and ill-usage, else I vow he had never acted as he did. He followed King James to France, having already lost lands and money in his service, and then, when I was about eight years old, some affront was put on him at the French Court and he fled to England, carrying me with him and leaving me in the care of a Kinswoman of my Mother's. After that I saw him seldom and knew nothing of his doings. I worshipped him alive, and even now my chief desire is to atone so far as I may for his sins. As you know, my first care on coming here was to place his poor, dishonoured remains in consecrated ground."

She paused, looking from one to the other appealingly; but Sir Jocelyn, with an imperative gesture, ordered her to proceed.

"I was kept in entire ignorance of my Father's terrible history," she went on, faltering, "and of the manner of his death till just before I came here. When my

Kinswoman died my Cousin, seeing me alone in the world, openly declared the love he had long felt for me, and then his Mother, hearing that we had plighted our troth, flew out in wrath and told me the reason why I must never expect any honest man to share my own dishonour. I fled from my Cousin then—I have ever since sought to withstand him, but now he has been too strong for me. Sir, be generous—as I told you before, all the love I have is his! Though I strove to subdue my heart and to school myself to the thought of being your Wife, I——”

“Now, by——! this is too much,” broke out Sir Jocelyn. “I cannot be played with after this fashion. No, Madam, you must not expect me to facilitate your loves. You were mine—all but mine—when he baulked me. I will not give you up, I say. He is my prey whom I thought to have netted; and if I cannot bring him to justice for this freak of his, I refuse to let him profit by it. His love is not greater than mine and my right to you is stronger for I have the claim of the conqueror.”

“Well, then, Sir, what do you propose to do?” said my Master, as he paused.

“I propose to settle the dispute in the old way,” returned Sir Jocelyn, fiercely. “Aye, after the fashion which hath obtained since the beginning of the world—in such a way as the very beasts settle their rivalries. Let us fight for her, Sir—man to man—to the death! And she shall swear to wed the victor.”

Dorothy uttered a faint cry, and he turned upon her savagely.

“Yes, Madam, ’tis the only way now. If you refuse, the law must have its will with him, and I doubt if his story will hold good before a Court of Justice. Public dishonour awaits him, if not death itself.”

"You must agree, my sweet," said my Master. "As he says, 'tis the only way now. My honour, too, is pledged, and cries out for his blood. Have no fear—my love gives me the strength and skill of twenty men."

"We can fight here," said Sir Jocelyn, who was, as could be seen, itching to begin; "there is space enough and the floor is smooth, but we must have more light."

"Bring us hither some more candles, Dorothy," said my Master, as tranquilly as though they were needed to grace a banquet.

She had fallen back against the wall, groaning and wringing her hands; and made no attempt to obey till I stepped to her side.

"Get the candles, Madam," said I. "'Tis essential they should have light. Sir Jocelyn is far more like to hurt my Master if they fight in this darkness, and he will not, I see, brook much delay."

She went away with a faltering step, and I stood by, watching my Master and Sir Jocelyn make further preparation for the encounter. A glance round told me that Mrs. Dorothy had probably disposed of her live stock in my absence, for the great pans and dishes that were set forth upon the shelf that ran along one side were empty. She had, indeed, as I subsequently heard, been engaged in dusting and ranging these before our advent. There was no furniture in the place itself except a bench or two and a few cans, which the belligerents now moved out of the way. The room itself was well enough adapted to their purpose, being large and lofty, and, moreover, provided with a number of rusty sconces that might carry the candles for which Mrs. Dorothy had been despatched. I could not but think of the peaceful uses to which that great chamber had hitherto been put. It had been a Monks' Refectory, and here while they ate their frugal

meals they had kept strict silence, or listened to the pious discourse of one of their number, who had either preached a little homily to them or read aloud from some pious book. Here during the brief reign of Dorothy Ullathorne she had presided as Queen over the women ; skimmed the cream and made the butter with her own hands. The quiet walls had echoed to the plash of the churn and the chat and the laughter of the lasses—and now they were to resound to the clash of steel, the leaping of feet—to a death-cry, perhaps. I felt sick at heart at the thought on't ; and when Dorothy presently returned, more dead than alive, with a bundle of candles, I watched, as through a haze, Sir Jocelyn and my Master set them up in their respective sockets.

Still, as though in an evil dream, I saw Sir Jocelyn, ere he drew his blade, turn to Dorothy.

“ You pledge yourself to abide by the issue ? ” said he.

And I saw her incline her head.

Then they fell to—fierce of eye, nimble of foot, dexterous, desperate—I watching them all the time half-vacantly, saying to myself in a dull, stupid way : “ They'll kill each other — they will ! ” Then of a sudden I heard Sir Jocelyn cry “ Ha ! ” and saw him make a lunge ; and my Master with a sort of choking gasp staggered backward and was caught in Dorothy's arms. Waking all at once I rushed to her assistance, and between us we lowered him to the ground, the sword dropping from his nerveless hand.

With a shriek far wilder and more terrible than any cry I have ever heard from mortal lips, Dorothy snatched it and would have thrown herself upon it, had not Sir Jocelyn made a lightning-quick dart forward and seized her by the wrist.

For a moment he stood gazing down at her, holding

her fast in a grip of iron ; and I think it was he who tasted of the bitterness of death rather than the rival who had fallen by his hand.

"Let me die," panted Dorothy, struggling, "let me die! I must die!"

Sir Jocelyn remained looking down at her for a moment, all his passion falling from him, and a kind of grey pallor replacing the former flushed fury of his face. Thus have I seen the shadow of Death overcast the face of a man who has received a mortal wound.

"Nay," he returned at length, and I scarce recognised his voice, "nay, my dear, you must live—for your Husband's sake. He is not yet dead—you may nurse him back to life."

As he loosed her, she fell upon her knees, clasping his hand with a passion of tears.

"Said I not well," said Sir Jocelyn in that altered voice of his, "said I not well that I would one day bring you to my feet? I have given you back your word ; have you naught to give me in exchange?"

"My heart's love and gratitude," murmured she, pressing her lips to his hand.

"Your heart's love!" he repeated half to himself ; then gently raising her—"Nay, I spoke but of an old debt."

I scarce comprehended his meaning, but her woman's wits were quicker, and leaning forward with a most beautiful mingling of dignity and compassion she kissed him on the cheek.

CHAPTER XXX.

LAST WORDS.

I HAVE no clear recollection of what happened after the moment when Mrs. Dorothy Ullathorne paid that long-standing debt to Sir Jocelyn Gillibrand ; I think it must have been at that time I lost consciousness. I remember dimly the sound of groans, but whether they came from my own lips or from those of my Master I cannot tell. The terrible strain and anxiety and fatigue of the last few days, together with the fever in my veins and the by no means satisfactory condition of my wound, combined together to overthrow me. I believe the scarce-healed scar in my arm burst open with the exertion I had made in sustaining my Master's weight—but, be that as it may, I lay for a long while between life and death, first raving, they said, like a madman, and afterwards lying for all the world as if I were dead.

It wanted but a few days of Christmas when I opened, at length, eyes that could see and recognise, and found myself in my own little room at The Delf, with Patty ensconced on the window-seat sewing a seam.

I lay for a moment without speaking, weak as any kitten, but unspeakably glad. The window was ajar, and a cold tart breeze came in—our own breeze, smelling of the sea—and lifted the curls on the little wench's brow. Down in the dairy below I could hear the pails clattering and the click of my Mother's pattens as she crossed the

yard. The cows, too, were lowing in the shippon, and I almost fancied I could hear the milk splashing into the cans. It seemed to me that it had all passed away like a dream—the passion and the anguish and the fear ; all the strange happenings of the last months were as if they had never been : nothing was real but this old peaceful place, the familiar sounds without, and my little Patty sewing her white seam.

I called out to her at length in a voice scarce louder than a whisper ; and she jumped up joyfully, and ran towards me clapping her hands.

“Eh, thou art in thy right mind at last ! Thou knows me again !”

“Know thee again ?” I said, with a quavering laugh. “Small wonder in that !”

“My word, if thou could ha’ heard thyself !” she returned, shaking her head. “Ravin’ an’ cryin’ out an’ fightin’. Thou was all for makin’ an end o’ poor Doctor Bradley !”

I laughed again feebly and clacked my tongue in condemnation of my own conduct.

“And how is—” I faltered presently—“how is the Gentleman yonder ?” turning my eyes in the direction of Lychgate.

“Eh, he’s right enough. He comed round quicker nor thee. Dorothy would let nobody see to him but herself. Doctor Fanny and Master Formby both went up to Lychgate as soon as they heard o’ the to-do there, and the Gentleman—” she paused with a roguish look, “he’d come to hissels’ then, and he packed off Doctor Bradley and made the Parson bide.”

“To pray for him ?” I asked in an edified tone, as she paused.

“To marry him, my dear !” returned Patty triumph-

antly. "He was as near death as he could be at that time, but nothing would serve him but that the job must be done there and then. Dorothy had given him the slip too often, said he, for him to trust her, and if he had but an hour of life remaining, at least during that hour she should call him 'Husband'."

"Well, well!" ejaculated I.

"Yes, indeed," resumed Patty, "he must ha' had a wonderful constitution, or she must be a wonderful nurse, for he got well all by hissel' without any doctoring at all; so poor Doctor Bradley had all the more time to see to thee, lad, and eh, dear! he was devoted. All he's been doin' for thee!"

I began to realize that the sundry sore places about my person, of which I was disagreeably conscious, were so many testimonies of the Doctor's assiduous care in blistering and bleeding; and the sense of discomfort was lost in that of gratitude.

"Yes," went on Patty, "the Gentleman was on his legs ten days ago when they came to fetch 'em both away."

"They!" interrupted I, "who?"

"Well, I never heard who," returned she. "A very fine lady came—the Gentleman's Mother, I believe. My Mother says she wept as she embraced Dorothy and begged her pardon—but what for I don't know—and there were one or two gentlemen, and two such grand coaches, and a whole parcel of servants. But they only stayed an hour or so and started off again, carrying Dorothy and her Husband with them. Even old Malachi is gone and Fleetfoot—for Dorothy declared she would never part with that good horse. The whole place is deserted, Luke, but——"

I interrupted her with a kind of groan. In spite of the relief I had previously felt I was conscious of a pang on

hearing of so complete and irrevocable a break. But I almost immediately recovered myself and asked for Chestnut ; and on being satisfied as to his safe return I next inquired, somewhat hesitatingly, for Sir Jocelyn.

"Ah," said Patty very seriously, "he is sad enough, poor Gentleman, I warrant you, though he does not say much. He was there to say good-bye to Madam Dorothy and all the fine folks—very gracious and polite he was, I doubt he looks twenty year older, Luke."

"Does he, indeed?" said I, troubled.

"Yes—but not a bit fierce, thou knows. I can scarce believe 'twas he who was so near makin' an end of the strange Gentleman and yourself. He was quite taken to about thee, Luke, and has come here ever so often to ask for thee. And the day that Doctor Bradley said you were beginning to mend he fair shouted out wi' joy. 'Come,' says he, 'all's not going wrong then. That lad will live to be a fine man and a happy one.' Then, he says, clapping the Doctor on the back, 'Now Fanny, why shouldn't you be a happy man too?' 'In what way?' said the Doctor, turning as red as a Turkey cock. 'Why, by making it up with my Cousin Penny. Hark ye,' he says, 'I've a plan in my head. I've a notion to do something with that desolate old place, Lychgate. I've no mind to take another tenant,' he says, 'and yet 'tis a pity to suffer it to lie there, an eyesore and blot on the property. I have a mind to patch it up in some measure and turn it into an hospital for poor folks. Then, if you married Penny, you could live snugly enough in the West wing, and look after them in the intervals of killing your other patients; and Penny could nurse 'em and be kind to 'em and coddle 'em. What think you of the notion?' says he. 'Come, you know you are in love with Penny, and would count your-

self the happiest of men could you make her your Wife.' 'Why, indeed,' says the Doctor, getting redder than ever, and then he stopped short, looking awful foolish. 'But would her Ladyship approve?' says he. '*I* approve,' cried Sir Jocelyn. 'You can't please every one in this world, my dear Fanny, so you'd best try to earn the favour of the most powerful. I have this marriage at heart. Confound it, man, you shall be happy whether you like it or not.'

We both laughed, and then Patty said: "That wedding will take place before aught's long, you may be sure. But now we have been talking more than is good for you. Take a drink and then lie quiet."

She slipped her arm under my head—such a deft wench it was!—and put a cup to my lips; and after I had sipped a little she set it down again and went back to her sewing. I watched her clever little fingers for some time, and then I said in a rather trembling voice:—

"Everybody seems to be getting married, Patty".

"Yes, indeed," returned she, biting off an end of her thread and looking up innocently.

"You'll be the next, I suppose," said I, trying to steady my voice, but finding it hard work, for my heart was beating fast.

"No," she returned, shaking her head. "I'm not in a hurry to get wed, Luke. I'm going to stay at home and take care of Father and Mother."

She spoke very carelessly; but all at once she became pink up to the roots of her hair. I had been discouraged by her coolness, but now the sight of her little rosy flag made my heart leap.

"And me?" said I. "Won't you take care o' me too?"

"Oh, to be sure," she returned, with ever the same lightness. "Why not?"

But I was not deceived.

"Patty," I whispered, raising myself as well as I could, "Patty, come here—come a bit nearer—eh, Patty," I cried, catching at her hand as she advanced, "couldst ever like me a little bit, thinks thou?"

"Eh, Luke, thou great Noddy," she returned, between tears and laughter, "I never liked anybody else sin' I were born."

The very next moment my Mother pops in and finds us holding each other's hands; and "Eh, Mother!" said we, both together, and then stopped short.

Thereupon she clapped her hands and ran downstairs as if she had been a young woman.

"Gaffer! Gaffer!" cried she, "here's our Luke come to hiss' again, and only think, he's got agate o' courtin' our Patty!"

It was wonderful, as my Mother said, that nobody had thought of such a thing before, for our match suited everybody to admiration. Was not Patty a Forshaw born and bred, and by marrying her was I not justly entitled to help my Father on the farm, which I might now without offence look forward to possessing by right of my marriage?

Johnny's prospects were rather improved than damaged by the exchange, since he, as Uncle Waring had frequently declared, was cut out to be a lawyer. Though frail and delicate in body he was amazing sharp, and when, in course of time, he was advanced to my place in the office, he so gained my Uncle's favour that he publicly adopted him as heir—and that good man had not looked after other people's business so long without attending satisfactorily to his own. My Father was delighted at the pretext which would make me a good farmer instead of a very indifferent lawyer, and if he had

any qualms of conscience about the succession, they were set at rest by the birth of my eldest son. For if ever there was a chip of the old block it was James Forshaw the second—at his very christening the gossips declared him to be the “spit and image of his grandfeyther”; and when he began to toddle about, the likeness between the two was positively comical. The little lad would set on his hat in the same fashion as the Gaffer’s, and straddle about in his wake with his chubby legs as wide apart as might be. Aye, and he would even strive to speak in a gruff voice before he could scarce say a plain word at all. The old man worshipped him.

“There’s a Forshaw for ye!” he would say. “A deal more like the family nor either Patty or Johnny. Thou’ll make him drop the name o’ Wright when he comes into the place, lad?”

“I shan’t be there to see,” I returned, laughing, “but we’s tell him about it.”

Sir Jocelyn lived a lonesome life enough at Ferneby Hall, though her Ladyship came back to keep house for him, and he now and then invited his friends among the Quality to stay there. But he had lost his spirits, and rode or walked about the place with a pensive air as though he were for ever brooding on the past.

One day he saw me standing at our gate and stopped to speak to me.

“I’ve something here that may interest you, Luke,” said he, and he took a letter from his pocket, pointing out the place where I was to begin to read.

I could scarce make head or tail on’t at first. ’Twas writ by some friend of his and gave an account of some great festivity—in London ’twas, I think—describing the ladies’ dresses, and dwelling in particular on the appearance of one of the chief beauties. This lady, it seemed,

wore a robe of rose-colour and silver, and the most magnificent jewels. Much was said about her beauty and the admiration she excited. In spite of which, went on the writer, it was evident she had no eyes for any but her own gallant Husband.

"And you know who that is, Luke?" said Sir Jocelyn, as I looked up somewhat mystified.

He repeated aloud the name which he had so wrathfully pronounced long ago as we rode away from Bax Wood. Recollection suddenly flashed upon me, and I looked back at him without speaking.

"Aye, indeed," said he, half to himself, "she must have looked well—a very Queen of Love and Beauty."

Then turning to me with a smile. "Do you mind," said he, "how she came stepping across the meadow in her linen gown?"

Patty, who had come up with the little lad clinging to her skirts, caught the last words and looked from one to the other of us. Both of us were moved, for the picture which they conjured up was vivid in each of our minds.

"It is all past and gone," said she, very softly. "She is happy and we are happy—why should you not try to be happy too, your Honour?"

He looked at her rather frowningly, but she went on:—

"There's Luke was as much taken up with her as any one at first, but now he can do with me very well."

"Ah," said I, looking at her fondly, "I can put up with you."

"'Tis a different matter," returned he, almost sharply. "Luke was very young—you could scarce call it love on his part. A little seedling," said he, "blown by the first wind, and without roots. But for me——"

He broke off, and we were all silent for a moment,

knowing indeed that the love which had taken possession of him had entwined its roots in his very being.

"For all that," said Patty, "there's one reason why I think your Honour should wed."

"And what's that?" said he.

She caught up the little lad and made bold to put him straight in Sir Jocelyn's arms. "Ah," said Patty in a rather shaking voice, and with those pretty eyes of hers growing dim, "we all love your Honour, and are sad to think of the lonesome life you lead yonder. Eh, dear, what a difference 'twould make if there were little feet pattering about those big empty rooms, and how proud her Ladyship would be—and wouldn't it be a comfort to your Honour to think that the name wouldn't die out, and that there would still be Gillibrands at Ferneby after you was gone to your long home?"

He was looking at her half-resentfully, half-haughtily, and I was feeling somewhat fearful of her being over-bold, when of a sudden our little Son, who was ever a friendly child, and who scarce knew what to make of all our solemn faces, leaped in Sir Jocelyn's arms with a crow of laughter, and then bending forward patted his cheeks with his dimpled hands.

Sir Jocelyn kissed him, but set him down very quickly, walking away without another word; yet our Patty always avers that the feeling of those little fat hands woke up something within him which he had thought dead.

I would, indeed, Sir Jocelyn would wed, that Ferneby Hall might become cheerful again with young faces and young voices.

Lychgate itself has ceased to become a terror to the countryside. What room could there be for sinister forebodings in the comfortable home where so many old

folks find rest and peace, and where not a few regain health? (For his connection with the Gillibrand family hath so exalted the worthy Doctor in the eyes of the neighbouring gentry that his practice is ever on the increase, and he hath therefore little time to attend to the inmates of Lychgate.) Who, I say, could give reign to the imagination in presence of Doctor Fanny or his Mate?

As for the strange sounds which long ago woke the echoes of the place, Mrs. Penny indeed sometimes hears them still, but is never disconcerted; her Husband has been at pains to account for them, and immediately a distant rumbling falls upon her ear, she says tranquilly: "The wind is getting up," or else, "I believe there will be a storm to-day."

THE END

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